Letters to Röckel

Richard Wagner

RICHARD WAGNER'S LETTERS

TO

AUGUST ROECKEL

Translated by

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WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY
BY HOUSTON STEWART CHAMBERLAIN

HERITAGE

WAGNER.

BY

HOUSTON STEWART CHAMBERLAIN.

PREFACE.

IT is curious to observe how much deeper the French go in their interest for Richard Wagner than the English. The English flock to Bayreuth, that is true, and they flock to Richter's concerts and to the wretched parodies of Wagner's operas with which the metropolis is occasionally gratified; but even among enthusiasts, hardly one in a thousand knows anything about Wagner, the *man*, nor of the stubborn battle waged by him during fifty

years against a demoralised and demoralising stage, and against the perversion of music—or of what he calls "*the* Christian Art"—into a mere accomplishment, a mere trade and handicraft. Hardly anyone in England (outside a small cluster of enthusiasts) takes the trouble to study seriously Wagner's doctrine of a new form of Drama which resembles the Opera only on the principle of "*les extrêmes se touchent.*" We simply like his music, or we don't like it, and trouble our heads no further on the matter. In France, on the contrary, the literature on Wagner is almost as voluminous and at least as valuable as that in Germany. All the principal Journals and Reviews—the *Revue des deux Mondes*, the *Revue de Paris*, the *Revue Bleue*, the *Revue Blanche*, etc.—have frequent and interesting articles on Wagner, signed by men of the highest literary standing, such as Catulle Mendès, Mallarmé, Gaston Paris, Schuré, Wyzewa, not one of whom is a professional

musician, or would ever dream of severing the composer in Wagner from the poet and the philosopher. In short, the French have long since discovered that of which we still remain ignorant; viz., that Wagner is not only a remarkable musician, but a creative genius of the very first order; a man so many-sided in his interests and so lucid and energetic in his thought, that, quite apart from his music, he deserves to be studied as one of the most remarkable minds of this century.

Now, it is no good trying to swim against the tide, and I fear even Mr. William Ashton Ellis' admirable translation of Wagner's prose writings is not likely to do much good until our interest in Wagner has been aroused. Nothing is so likely to arouse it as Wagner's letters, for these show us the *man;* he seems to step out of them bodily before our eyes. And this man is so upright, simple, sincere, and lovable, such a manly man, that we at once feel under the

spell and long to know more about him. There is nothing of the *style épistolaire* in Wagner's letters; they are always written rapidly, and rarely is there a word struck out or altered. Spontaneousness was one of the great charms of Wagner's personal intercourse: it is the same with his letters. A few of these, read with the vivid remembrance of his music in our ears, suffice to make one feel intimate with him. His extraordinary sensitiveness comes out in almost every letter. No impressions from outside are necessary; whatever subject his thought rests on, his mind at once adopts a peculiar complexion, his voice modulates into the key most fitted to this emotion. In one and the same letter he is boisterously gay as a schoolboy, and suddenly, as the picture of a suffering friend suggests itself, he strikes the deepest chords of melancholy; or, again, some word casually dropped lays bare the underlying philosophical current, and he launches forth

into subtle dialectical argument, such as would do honour to a Petrus Abaelardus. However, where Wagner is at home, and where we feel that his words are *master words*—that is, when he talks of the Drama and Music, and this, as the absorbing aim and object of his life, is the subject of almost all his letters. His interests are many—politics, philosophy, religion, literature—but they all centre and culminate in *Art* (understood in the comprehensive sense of the German word "Kunst").

Art is for him, as it was for Schiller, the source and crown of civilisation; Art is the handmaiden of religion. And what Art is for civilisation, that the Drama is for Art. The Drama is not only the climax of the inventive powers of man, but it is the fountain-head from which the several individual arts originate, and towards which they again converge; it is the heart that propels the life-giving blood through the entire body, and which gathers it

back from each separate member in order to infuse new life into the whole. There is no reason, and in fact no possibility, of separating Wagner's music from his Drama. "Go deep enough, there is music everywhere," says Carlyle, in speaking of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. The poet Wagner goes deep, and what eyes cannot see, nor words utter, finds shape and language in music such as his. This is not the music of mere sensual melody and rhythm that serves as an opiate after toil and care, or as a pastime to charm away an idle hour. It is a music akin to that in which popular instinct had so often given expression to feelings which the mere words of its ballads and songs were able to convey but imperfectly; it is the music which the genius of Mozart unconsciously lights upon, thus transforming frivolous and preposterous libretti into immortal creations; it is the music of those deepest depths in which Beethoven lived and moved

and had his being. Wagner's music is not melodramatic, it is not intended to illustrate the stage action; with him *the music* IS *the drama*, and both the action which we see and the thoughts that words give expression to are merely a reflex, an "allegory" of the real dramatic action, of the action in the "depths" that Carlyle alludes to, where Music is the one and only language of man and of all creation.

It was necessary to lay some stress upon this point, for much in Wagner's letters would be quite incomprehensible to anyone accustomed to think of him as a mere musician, in the ordinary superficial sense of the word. Such a person would be perplexed to find Wagner always engrossed in the poem and in the dramatic action. Wagner, who dislikes theory in Art, and who writes such books as the *Artwork of the Future* and *Opera and Drama* merely because this was the only means of making way for his new conception of the

Drama, rarely, if ever, in his letters starts theoretical discussions concerning music. He is naturally very full of his works, and what he says is most instructive, both for our knowledge of his works individually and for a thorough mastery of his conception of Art and the Drama in general. However, it will only be found instructive to those who start unprejudiced, and with the sincere desire, not of finding fault with Wagner, but of understanding him and entering into his way of feeling as regards the organic relationship between Music and the Drama.

Three collections of letters by Wagner have been published. One consists of some two hundred letters to Liszt;* a second, of one hundred and seventy-five letters to his Dresden friends, Uhlig, Fischer, and Heine;† the third

* An English translation of the Wagner-Liszt letters, under the title *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt*, by the late Dr. Hueffer (of *The Times*), was published by H. Grevel & Co., King Street, London.

† The correspondence with Uhlig, in an English translation by J. S. Shedlock, was published also by H. Grevel & Co.

collection of letters, those addressed to Roeckel and here introduced to the English reader, is comparatively very small—twelve letters only; but owing to a peculiar combination of circumstances, these twelve letters are so full of varied interest, that perhaps no other publication exists which is so qualified to serve as a first introduction to Wagner.

Liszt was, both intellectually and as a musician, immensely superior to Wagner's other correspondents. But this very superiority, added to the fact that Liszt was constantly actively engaged in propagating Wagner's works, and in pleading his cause before kings and princes and before the public, rendered it unnecessary for Wagner to enter into details concerning his poems in writing to Liszt as he does with others. What forms the subject-matter of this correspondence is, on the one hand, debate and counsel concerning the endless difficulties which beset his life; on the other hand, the

outbreaks of passionate love and gratitude on the part of the poor exile, who feels that but for this great man's unswerving devotion he must be lost for ever. The correspondence with Liszt is thus a mine of biographical facts, and at the same time one of the most pathetic documents we possess concerning Wagner. But, as Liszt says in one of his letters: "One single chord brings our two hearts nearer to each other than any amount of verbiage." Intimacy is seen quite as much in what people hold their tongues about as in what they say to each other.

Wagner's letters to Uhlig are of a totally different nature. Uhlig was a clever and a refined man, gifted with a singularly receptive intellect. Liszt never entered into the detail of Wagner's thought, Uhlig did; Liszt cared little or nothing for Wagner's social aspirations after a regenerated humanity, crowned by a regenerated Art: he was content to know that

Wagner was a "divine genius," and to serve him and admire his works. Uhlig, on the contrary, was the first man to enter into the spirit of Wagner's doctrine, and to understand that no more than you can separate his music from his poems, no more can you sever his artistic from his social convictions. He was the first also to acknowledge this publicly, and to defend in the Press what may be called the "Wagnerian doctrine." Political and social questions, also questions concerning the essence of music and of dramatic art, are thus naturally and freely dwelt upon in these letters, constituting their great interest.

Now, what causes the peculiarity of Wagner's letters to Roeckel is precisely the fact that this correspondent does not submit his judgment to Wagner's as that of a superior mind, but that he discusses every point on a footing of intellectual equality. Uhlig's cleverness showed itself in nothing more than in the sagacity with

which he gauged the immense superiority of Wagner's mind over his own. Roeckel was certainly gifted enough to feel the same, but he did not feel it in the same degree. His intimacy with Wagner dated further back than that of Liszt and Uhlig, to a period when the young poet and musician was himself still hesitating on many questions, still wavering between the promptings of the inner voice, which impelled him to revolt, and the enticing hope that Society, and with it theatrical art, might be renovated by less radical measures. Roeckel had been the friend and confidant of this early period of mental fermentation. Day after day, during five or six years, he had discussed all these burning questions with Wagner, and it is perhaps not advancing too much if we attribute to Roeckel's high moral courage and unflinching devotion to truth some share in that final evolution which led Wagner to break openly and without hope of return

with a theatre and a social organisation which he at heart despised. This it was which made of Wagner the truly great man he was. It was natural that the friend who had witnessed the critical phase of this evolution, and perhaps been instrumental in the triumph of the heroic principle over the worldly one, should feel more independence in the presence of this master-mind than those who encountered it later. Wagner looked for contradiction and discussion when he spoke with Roeckel, nor was he disappointed. Moreover, in the hard school of adversity, during the dreary years of imprisonment, Roeckel's mind seems to have acquired a considerable inflexibility, not to say stubbornness. Wagner pushed on boldly; once he had admitted the premises, he followed them out to their ultimate conclusions. Roeckel refused to follow him. No doubt Uhlig did not always understand what the Master meant, and we may be sure he occasionally differed from him;

but he did not discuss, his veneration for genius would not have allowed him to do so. He simply pointed out what he could not grasp. Roeckel, on the contrary, although bound to Wagner by the ties of the most intimate friendship—a friendship that death alone severed,—seems to have opposed him at every point. His letters unfortunately are lost, but we can guess at their contents from Wagner's answers, and we have every reason to feel grateful to Roeckel for the honest consistency with which he contradicts Wagner about politics, attacks his philosophy, and criticises his poems. For it is to this pugnacious opposition that we owe the beautiful commentary on the *Ring des Nibelungen* and on the Drama in general in letter No. 4, the lucid dissertation on Schopenhauer's philosophy in letter 6, the inquiry concerning the influence of philosophy on Art in letter 7, that on the aim and scope of politics in letter 8, and so on. In

short, the special character and the peculiar interest of these letters to Roeckel are due to two causes. On the one hand, to Wagner's great affection for this particular friend, and consequent wish to be fully understood by him; and, on the other hand, to Roeckel's inability to see things in the same light as his illustrious correspondent, and to his plainspoken acknowledgment of this fact.

Here it may be well to insert a few lines concerning August Roeckel. The reader will like to know who this friend was, to whom Wagner clung so steadfastly. If, as the Latin proverb says, "a man may be judged by his friends," to know Roeckel will teach us something of Wagner also.

August Roeckel's father, Joseph August Roeckel, was a native of the Palatinate. At that time, towards the close of the last century, this province was politically united with

Bavaria, and it so chanced that Joseph A. Roeckel, who had begun life in the diplomatic service, was appointed Secretary to the Bavarian Chargé d'Affaires at Salzburg, which brought him into the neighbourhood of Vienna, at that time the metropolis of music. Here Baron Braun, so well known in the history of music as Beethoven's friend and as director of several Viennese theatres, happened to hear the young attaché sing, and was so much struck by his beautiful voice and musical gifts, that he at once proposed that Roeckel should take an engagement at Vienna, where they were sorely in need of a tenor. Diplomacy was a precarious career at that moment—1805,—and, after some hesitation, Roeckel accepted Baron Braun's offer, and exchanged diplomacy for the stage. In Vienna he saw a good deal of Beethoven: one of his first parts was as Florestan in "Fidelio." He also came into contact with all the other musical men of the day, more especially with

Hummel, who married his sister. Joseph A. Roeckel later became director of the theatre at Aix la Chapelle, and, after having acquired the necessary experience in this branch, he made proof of both pluck and talent, venturing as the very first impresario to carry the German opera to Paris and to London.

The reader will gather from all this how full of interest must have been the youth of our August Roeckel. Born at Graz in 1814, he travelled with his father through Germany whilst still a boy. He then spent two years in Paris, where he witnessed the revolution of July, 1830, and afterwards lived for several years in London. Constantly in the atmosphere of music and surrounded by musicians, his great aptitude for this art developed early, and already at seventeen years of age he was such a consummate chorus-master that the Théatre Italien engaged him in this capacity, in the hopes of bringing their chorus up to the level

attained at Joseph A. Roeckel's German opera. This last was conducted for some time by none less than Hummel. But life in England seems not to have suited August Roeckel's fancy, and whilst his brothers, Edward Roeckel and J. L. Roeckel, settled in England, August returned to Germany, and joined his uncle Hummel at Weimar, under whom he studied composition. After having been for several years "Musikdirector" at Bamberg, he was appointed to the same post at Weimar, where, having married the niece of the celebrated composer, Albert Lortzing, he spent the happiest years of his life from 1838 to 1843. In this small town, still alive with the traditions of the great epoch only just closed, Roeckel's talent and energy were fully appreciated, and by none more than by Goëthe's daughter-in-law and her sons, Wolfgang and Walther, the sincerity of whose friendship for Roeckel and his family was put to the proof in

the bitter years that were to come. 1843 was a momentous date in Roeckel's life. He exchanged the quiet seclusion of Weimar for Dresden, where the political effervescence was already beginning to stir up the whole population, and here he met Richard Wagner, with whom he soon became very intimate. Both these facts, or rather these two facts combined, had a fatal influence on the rest of his career, for they ended by throwing him out of the profession for which he had been bred and for which he had early shown such great gifts, and by casting him headlong into the turmoil of politics. A sorry exchange in any case, and more especially for a man of such rigid principles, who was far too honest, too high-minded and self-sacrificing to be likely to serve his own interests whilst serving those of the community.

August Roeckel has more than once been called Wagner's "bad genius," a most absurd accusation; it would be much truer to say that

Wagner's friendship, productive as it was of deep and life-long happiness, was nevertheless Roeckel's evil star. As "Musikdirector" to the Dresden Royal Opera House, to which Wagner had been appointed "Kapellmeister" on the 1st of February, the same year (1843), Roeckel became Wagner's colleague: their professional duties made them meet every day, and they soon became intimate. Wagner's "Rienzi," performed for the first time on the 20th October, 1842, on this very Dresden stage, and his "Flying Dutchman" following rapidly (2nd January, 1843), had made his name celebrated throughout Germany. When Roeckel arrived at Dresden in the spring of 1843, Wagner was just finishing the poem of "Tannhäuser," the score of which he at once began. In the spring of 1845 "Tannhäuser" was finished, but before its first performance (on the 19th October, 1845) "Lohengrin" was already begun and the "Meistersinger" sketched; and

scarcely had Wagner jotted down the last note of the "Lohengrin" score, in the summer of 1847, when he launched forth into elaborate historical researches for a spoken drama, "Frederic Barbarossa," and forged his tetralogical musical drama, "The Ring of the "Nibelung," out of the confused mass of mythological Sagas and legends of the "Edda" and the "Nibelungenlied." In the same summer (1848) in which Wagner wrote the complete sketch of this *opus summum* of his life, he also drew the outlines of his "Jesus of Nazareth," which has been described by a Catholic priest as "perhaps the most successful attempt ever made to place the divine person of our Saviour on the stage." This was what Roeckel was witness to during the years 1843–1849, in which he was Wagner's almost daily companion. Before the evidence of such stupendous creative power, his own talent, or rather his belief in his own talent, vanished. Roeckel

had written songs and compositions for the pianoforte, and his appointment at Dresden he owed to an opera, "Farinelli," which Wagner (as I am told) thought well of. But how insignificant and futile was all this compared to the immortal works which he now saw springing into existence day by day! Had Roeckel been less gifted intellectually, he would not have recognised Wagner's genius, and had he been less high-minded, he would have felt envy, instead of admiration; or, again, if his own talent as musician had been more robust and original, intercourse with Wagner would have stimulated his creative faculties (as was the case with Lizst, for example). As it was, the proximity of genius seems to have blotted out all Roeckel's ambition in the domain of Art. Thus Wagner's friendship robbed him of a life-interest, and almost drove him to consecrate his energy to another direction. He did not give up his place at the Dresden Opera

House, but he became an active politician, a pamphleteer, the editor of a revolutionary paper, and a favourite orator at public meetings. His enemies called him a demagogue, but that was a base calumny. He was a tribune in the proudest sense of the word, and no Englishman who knows what the political state of Germany was at that period will refuse his admiration to the man who, unlike so many other German revolutionists, risked his liberty and his life for the cause of the people against their tyrants, and paid for it by thirteen long years spent in a dungeon.

The revolution which broke out in Dresden in May, 1849, was entirely the doing of the King of Saxony and his Ministry. By their vacillation and continual shuffling they drove the people mad, and, when Dresden rose, the whole intelligence of the country—the Universities, the Bar—rose with it, and the then legal Government of Germany, the Frankfort Parlia-

ment, openly sided with the Saxon people against their rebellious Ministers. The Saxon people, who were perfectly loyal subjects of their hereditary Monarch, and only claimed the rights they possessed by law and the accession of their country to the Constitution voted at Frankfort, whereby a united Germany was to be established, would have won the day. But Count Beust, the King's chief counsellor, called on the Prussians for aid, who were, of course, too happy to profit by the occasion to gain a firm footing in Saxony. The Parliament at Frankfort stigmatised this armed intervention as "a scandalous breach of the Constitution." But in the meantime the Prussian troops had already reached Dresden, and had crushed the people's aspirations after liberty and law in the way military Powers usually do such things. The horrors enacted by the soldiers and officers make one's blood run cold. Roeckel, one of the

few leaders of the movement who retained his coolness and courage up to the last, was condemned to death, a sentence that was commuted into life-long imprisonment. He never would consent to do as the others, and petition the King's indulgence; having committed no crime, he needed no forgiveness, nor would he ever consent to sign a paper pledging his word never again to engage in politics. On the contrary, he used to tell his prison authorities that, as soon as he was free, he would again attack the Government as it deserved. And so Roeckel was one of the very last men to be let out of prison. Not until 1862 did the Saxon Government grow sufficiently ashamed of itself to put an end to this persecution. Soon after, the Prussian army once more appeared before Dresden and threw up earthworks (some of which may still be seen) all round the town, but the Royal Government had not as much pluck in 1886 as had the

wretched inhabitants in 1849; it thought discretion the better part of valour, and submitted without striking a blow to Prussia's conditions. As for Count Beust, he had proved such a prodigious diplomatist that he was considered ripe for Austrian service; nor did he disappoint his cunning allies of heretofore.

Before returning to Wagner and to the letters contained in this volume, it may be well to finish this brief sketch of August Roeckel's life. It will not detain us long, for nothing very remarkable occurred after his release from prison. Politics absorbed his whole interests, and journalism was the only means open to him of serving his political aims and at the same time that of earning his livelihood. And so we find him as newspaper editor, first at Coburg, then at Frankfort, later on (under Wagner's protection), in 1866, at Munich, which he soon had to leave, however. He finally settled in Vienna as editor of the *Kleine*

Presse. The mere geographical sequence suffices to show that Roeckel remained up to the end an irreconcilable enemy of Prussia. He had longed, and he had fought, and he had suffered, for a great, united, and independent Germany, and now that the dream of his life was accomplished, he shut himself out voluntarily from his "Fatherland." Thus we see him at the close of his life not only sharing the same fate as the great antagonist of Germany's unity and his own personal persecutor, Count Beust, but actually on the best terms with him —the once enemies united by their common hatred of Prussia, and Roeckel, the undaunted Liberal, actually serving to the best of his abilities a reactionary and anti-German Government. It is a singularly melancholy fate, and doubtless contributed to shorten his days. In 1871 he had a first attack of paralysis; others followed. He never recovered to any extent, and had soon to give up his journalistic work

and retire to the house of his youngest son, Richard Roeckel, at Pesth. There he died, on the 15th June, 1876, two months before the first performance of his great friend's "Ring des Nibelungen" at Bayreuth. The only work of Roeckel's that remains of him is his book *Sachsen's Erhebung und das Zuchthaus zu Waldheim* (the revolt of Saxony and my prison at Waldheim). Wagner alludes to it in the twelfth letter of this collection. It is a most thrilling narrative, and although the author, with his great modesty, keeps himself in the shade, one seems to become quite intimate with him during those long years of imprisonment. No one can read it without respecting him and loving him. Roeckel was the sort of man for Englishmen to understand and appreciate.

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And now let us go back to that other man, whom it will always be infinitely more difficult

to understand because, as one of the most perfect types of absolute *genius*, or, as Carlyle would have put it, of the Hero as poet, his intellect moved in obedience to laws different from those which govern ordinary men.

I have pointed out the absurdity of the opinion which stamps Roeckel as Wagner's evil genius and thinks that it was his fault that Wagner got mixed up in the revolt of 1849. Years before he and Roeckel first met, Wagner had declared, "My path leads me to open revolution against what the present day calls Art." And as, in Wagner's mind, the Art of a nation or of an epoch is not a casual excrescence, but the logical outcome of the whole life of Society, a corrupt Art is unquestionably indicative of a corrupt Society, and to revolt against Art is to revolt against the Society from which this Art springs. In this sense, which, it will be allowed, admits of no equivocation, Wagner may be said to have been a revolutionist ever

since 1840, and his very latest writings leave no doubt that he continued to be a revolutionist down to the day of his death. But the events of 1849, which marred and broke poor Roeckel's life, have in Wagner's life no importance beyond that which the increased experience of men and things signifies for such a mind. As a generous man, he could not hesitate on which side to place his sympathies, and when the actual conflict came—the fighting in the streets, the flocking in of the peasantry into the town, to ward off the foreign enemy and to stake their lives for their rights,—we are not astonished to see that his sympathy with the people is sufficiently marked to awaken suspicion on the part of the authorities, and to force him to seek safety in flight. No doubt Wagner felt the influence of the wave of enthusiasm which swept across Germany in 1848–49. No doubt he was at that moment the victim of many illusions, and set his hope on men and on

popular movements; but all this remains for him superficial and external. He is like a rock; the waves break at its feet and sometimes cast their spray up to its very head, but the rock neither moves nor crumbles. In reality, Wagner never at any time had any sort of sympathy with *politics* properly so called. Politics and diplomacy, to Wagner's mind, go only skin deep. They can do no more than settle details, no more than hurry on events or retard them a little; and whilst seeming to lead, they in reality obey, driven on by deeper currents they have neither power to stay nor to alter. In regard to this question, the eighth letter of this collection will be found particularly interesting. It was those deeper currents which alone absorbed Wagner's attention. He was a good and loyal Saxon, but he never utters a word against Prussia; later on we find him the confidant of the King of Bavaria at a most critical period of history, but he does not gravitate

southward, as did Roeckel, for his judgment is not blinded by political prejudice; he was a staunch and enthusiastic German, yet no man had a keener eye for the shortcomings of his countrymen, and whilst Germany after 1870 knelt adoring at the feet of the man of blood and iron, Wagner pointed out how little this mere politician was in touch with the higher aspirations of the nation, and how he had reaped, but could not sow.

I have thought it necessary to insist at some length on this point, because the difference between Wagner and Roeckel is not merely one of degree; it is not merely that the one is a genius and the other a man of talent, but it is a difference which affects the whole man. What bound them together in friendship was evidently sympathy of character, and not intellectual affinity. By this I do not mean to convey that Roeckel was intellectually inferior to men like Liszt and Uhlig, but that the natural bent of

his mind led him to diverge from Wagner on many, perhaps on most, points, and that he was far too independent a character to be overawed, even by genius. He and Wagner were both high-minded, outspoken, and unselfish men. Otherwise they were as dissimilar as possible, and I imagine that this dissimilarity constituted an additional zest to the friendship which bound them to each other. Both are idealists; but the one is a man who enlists his enthusiasm in the cause of the wrongs and sufferings of those who surround him, who longs to rescue the oppressed and to reform what is corrupt by practical means, by changing the form of government, by influencing public opinion, and so on; in short, he is essentially a politician, and the practical politician ends by eclipsing the poet and the artist his inner soul harboured. The other, on the contrary, is a creative genius, intensely wrapped up, it is true, not in Art only, but in all the questions that

concern the welfare of his country and of humanity at large, but who is quite incapable of doffing, even for a single moment, the artist and the poet, in order to discuss present events in a matter-of-fact, political way. When he does get mixed up in politics, as he did in 1849, and again later in Munich, he is yet never a party man, for what he aims at soars high above the conflicting currents of the passing moment. "The political events of the day never had any interest for me," writes Wagner in 1864. What does interest him are the great currents that sweep humanity on through centuries, to weal or to woe. In his *Art and Revolution*, written (1849) whilst his contemporaries were discussing the Frankfort Parliament, the growing influence of Prussia, and so forth, Wagner traces back the origin of the present state of society to the age of Pericles and of the decline of the Greek tragedy, and the Future he foretells is one

"the poet alone can conceive of." Thanks to his extraordinary powers of imagination, genius sees not only the one short passing moment, with its actors and all the petty influences which they obey, but grasps the Past out of which this Present grew, thus discerning in history Fate and Providence, and dives down into the depths of the unconscious but none the less propelling soul of nations, distinguishing with the keen eye of the poet a future still veiled to other men. No wonder Roeckel and Wagner often disagreed.

I do not think a detailed commentary to these letters is necessary, still less a critical examination of their contents. In order to understand them and to enjoy them, it is sufficient to know who the man was who wrote them, and who the man was to whom they were addressed. They will be found full of varied interest. Those who know nothing about Wagner will get but a one-sided, yet

true and vivid, impression of his remarkable personality; those who have a superficial acquaintance with him will realise how little they knew up to now; the few who would enrich their mental lives by a comprehensive knowledge of this great mind and noble character will read these letters over and over again, and always find new matter to claim their attention and captivate their thought.

LETTER I.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I have quite recently heard as a fact that you and your companions in misfortune are allowed to receive letters, not only from your nearest relatives, but also from your friends, provided that those letters merely touch on personal interests, or at any rate on such matters as have no reference to politics. Now, as my desire was, in the first place, to express my deep and anxious solicitude as to your fate, and in the second place to inform you how things had befallen me, I resolved at once to write to you. But, first and foremost, I was anxious to know exactly how you were as regards health. It was, therefore, a great pleasure to me to hear from your private doctor that

there was no truth in the rumour of your having, through impatience and insubordination, forfeited the favour of being allowed to occupy your time in literary work, and, further, that you were bearing up well under the circumstances, and that your vigour was undiminished. I admit that it is only since hearing this account of you* that I feel able to write to you as I should like.

You will readily believe that ever since we parted I have anxiously striven to have news of you, and, as far as was possible, I have kept myself informed as to your fate. Soon after we last met, it chanced that your wife and I were in the same town ;† but owing to a peculiar combination of circumstances, it was quite impossible for me to call upon her. Soon after I heard that your brother Edward had offered

* See Wagner's letter to Uhlig, dated May 10th, 1851.

† In Weimar. What prevented Wagner's calling on Frau Roeckel was the news of the "Steckbrief" (police notice), and his having to escape over the frontier to Switzerland as quickly as possible.

her a home, and that he was taking care of her in a truly fraternal way. I wrote to him not long ago, and received no answer; but as I addressed my letter in a haphazard fashion to Bath, it is quite possible that it never reached him; consequently I should be very glad to have his right address. I hope you will be able to write to me very fully concerning yourself and your wife. I look forward with keen sympathy and with eager impatience—hoping for the best—to your letter, and in the meantime I feel that the best thing that I can do, knowing your interest in me and my affairs, is to tell you shortly how things have fared with me.

The external circumstances of my life are easily told. After our separation, or rather at the close of the disastrous events‡ when we last met, I went first to Paris, but there I felt everything was at once repugnant to me; and

‡ This is in allusion to the political troubles in Dresden from 3rd to 9th of May, 1849.

though I was only remotely brought into contact with the artistic world, its whole conditions so repelled me that, after a very short stay, I left and went to Switzerland, and at Zürich I speedily found amongst the Swiss a circle of devoted, loyal, and sympathetic friends. This beautiful Alpine land at once revived me. I trust that you have sufficient fortitude not to be cast down by hearing this in your captivity. After I had lived down the painful impressions made on me by recent events, by the *contrariness* of present circumstances, and more especially by the fate of many of my friends, I felt my individual life quickened and restored to warmth and fulness by deliverance from the fetters and constraints of an impossible position. It is not necessary for me to tell you that I look on my release from the post of conductor of the Dresden opera as a providential piece of good fortune. With my whole nature, both as man and artist, in absolute opposition to my work

and my position, the only hope of deliverance was in a complete severance of my bonds. From the moment of that severance I felt that I had an important part to play; I realised that I was the only artist who as such had grasped the movement of the times. On this subject—*i.e.* on Art and its relation to life—I spoke out my views publicly as an author. Of course I do not know if you were allowed to see my writings. The first publication was a short pamphlet, entitled *Art and Revolution*, in which I denied to everything that passes muster as Art in the present day the true quality of Art. In a small book that appeared shortly after, *The Art-work of the Future*, I demonstrated the impotence of modern Art, resulting from its disintegration into different branches, which constitute the sole artistic life of the present day. And to this I opposed the Art of the future, the only Art that is truly in touch with life and penetrated with vital force, and represented it in such a way that it stood

out in sharp contrast to the merely academic, or merely fashionable, Art of the present day.

When I had completed this work, I had occasion, early in 1850, to return to Paris. During the interval Liszt had been working hard in my interests. He and my other friends were convinced that my one hope of a career lay in making my mark in the Paris Opera House. In spite of a sense of despair, I forced myself to yield the point to them. I sketched out a *scenario*, and started once more for Paris. The effort nearly cost me my life. My detestation of the artistic world of Paris, and the constraint that I had to put on myself, had such a powerful influence on me and affected me so strongly that it brought on complete nervous prostration, and from that prostration I only recovered by a tremendous effort of will—a sort of act of desperation—which constrained me to turn my back on all my friends and

to seek refuge amongst utter strangers. At that very time—I was in Bordeaux—I learnt through a French newspaper that you and Bakunin* had been condemned to death. I wrote you a letter, hoping that it would reach you in time to bid you both a last farewell. Soon after I discovered that the rumour had been a false one, and the letter which I had sent to Dresden to be forwarded to you was, naturally enough under the circumstances, detained. My intention to fly from my friends was frustrated by the great sympathy and affection evinced for me by a certain family. This household, composed almost entirely of women, lived some considerable time in Dresden, and is known to you, if I am not mistaken, through your brother. I owe more than I can say to them.† But, first and foremost, let me

* Bakunin was the famous Russian revolutionist who with Huebner and Tzschirner had commanded the insurrectionists at Dresden. After the repression of the revolution he had been taken prisoner at Chemnitz.

† This refers evidently to Frau Julie Ritter and her family.

mention Liszt; his love for me and his untiring devotion to my interests are almost incredible. Whatever in my nature remains incomprehensible to his mere logical reasoning, he succeeds in entering into by an ardent intuitive sympathy, the force of which is astounding. He has had my "Lohengrin" performed at Weimar, and in a manner that made it a real success—so much so, that they now speak of giving the opera at Dresden, but to this proposal I have made the most decided objections, and for many reasons. There is something to me ludicrous in the idea, which I hear maintained by many people, that it would be possible to bring about a reconciliation between my present self and the old condition of things. You see, my dear friend, how little one is understood, especially if one has the soul of an artist.

Lately I have once more given expression to my convictions as a man and as an artist-poet, —in the first place, and at some length, on the

subject of my own dramatic Art, in a book entitled *Opera and Drama*, and upon my own individual relations to Art in a "Communication to my Friends," which will appear as the preface to an edition of my three poems, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*. The first-mentioned work will shortly be brought out by Heber; the second by Breitkopf and Härtel. How I wish that I might be allowed to send you these books. Härtel's firm are engraving the pianoforte score of "Lohengrin," and—as you will be astonished to hear—they also mean to print the full score of the opera. From this you will see that public opinion has taken me into high favour as "artist"; but in the said "Communication" I have made it very clear that I care for no sympathy from those who distinguish between the "man" and the "artist," and I have pointed out the folly of making such a distinction. How unworthy—how, to put it frankly, absolutely contempt-

ible—our "Art" of the present day is, has at last become apparent now that it has cast aside all sense of shame and openly acknowledges that its one concern is to be a paying business. You may imagine how unhappy a man of my stamp feels under such circumstances. With open eyes, I have to abandon myself to illusions, in order to find my justification for a creative activity, conscious all the time that my activity merely serves to deceive me as to the general rottenness of things.

To continue theorising would be repugnant to me, and Liszt has stimulated me to a new work of Art. I have done the poetic version of *Young Siegfried*, which I confess has been a source of great happiness to me. My hero, a child of Nature, has grown up in the forest under the care of a dwarf (Mime, the Nibelung) who has brought him up in the hope that he may become the slayer of the dragon—the guardian of the treasure. This treasure of the

Nibelungs constitutes a very important element in the poem. Every sort of crime is connected with it. Siegfried is a being much like the youth in the fairy tale who goes out into the world that he may learn what fear is, which he quite fails to do, owing to his healthy natural instincts and his inability to see things otherwise than as they actually are. He slays the dragon, and kills his foster-father the dwarf, who for the sake of the treasure was secretly plotting to murder him. Siegfried, in whom the longing to escape from loneliness has awakened, is led by the voice of a bird—intelligible to him from the moment when he accidentally tasted the dragon's blood—to the fire-girt rock where Brünhilde lies in a deep sleep. Siegfried penetrates the flames, kisses Brünhilde, and the woman in her awakens to the raptures of love. I cannot enlarge farther on the subject now; possibly I may be allowed to send you the poem

itself. Only one word more: in our ardent discussions together we have already touched on this subject—It is not possible for us to attain to all that we can be and should be, so long as the woman is unawakened. But why do I harp upon this string to you, my poor friend? Believe me, I too am sad that I can do nothing beyond harping and singing. I shall finish my *Young Siegfried*, but not for one moment shall I be deceived about it, or fail to see that it is a beautiful illusion and that reality is the one thing that matters. It often seems to me that our invisible bonds have a more constraining power than the actual fetters by which others are bound. And yet, this I know, and this comfort I can offer you—do not be vexed with me, for it is the one hope by which we can all encourage one another,—let us strive to be and to keep healthy and natural, for therein lies everything—hope, comfort, confidence.

And now, my poor dear friend, I beg you, if you are allowed to write, to send me news of yourself, and as much in detail as possible; I shall always answer you, if permission to do so is granted, to the best of my powers, in the hope that my letters may cheer you and give you courage to endure with patience and fortitude. Farewell; and when you are feeling sad, think with affection of

Your faithful friend,

RICHARD WAGNER.

LETTER II.

Zürich,

*12th September, 1852.**

Your letter, my dear friend, has rejoiced me more than I can say. It was both unexpected and unhoped for; and it gives me such strong evidence of your cheerful and patient courage, that no better news could have come to me, and certainly nothing more fitted to raise my own spirits and encourage me. My health is not of the best, and though physically I appear sufficiently robust, my nervous system is in a very depressed state, gradually growing worse—the result of my self-abandonment to that feverish and excessive sensitiveness, in virtue of which I

* This letter was sent to Liszt to forward (*see* letter to Liszt of same date).

am the artistic being that I am. The nerves of my brain especially have been so worked upon by this constant dwelling in a world of imagination, with no reality to balance it, that now I am only able to work at long intervals and with frequent breaks, otherwise I should certainly fall into a state of constant and protracted suffering. I was in that condition when your letter reached me; its contents, taken in connection with your situation, formed a striking contrast to my situation and to my state of mind. It confirmed the feeling I have often had before, that a state of semi-liberty is more humiliating and oppressive than complete bondage; but I fear it would not be quite easy to make clear to you what I mean. My published writings testify to my want of freedom as an artist; the lash of compulsion alone forced me to become an author, and nothing was further from my thoughts than to write "Books." Had it been otherwise, the chances are you would

not have had cause to complain so much of my style. But the time for literary work is past with me; to have gone on with it, would have killed me. On the other hand, I have embarked on a great artistic undertaking, namely, the completion of a poem consisting of three dramas with a separate prologue, which I shall then set to music, and which—God knows when, where and how—I mean some day to have put on the stage. The whole poem will be called *The Ring of the Nibelung;* the prologue, "The Theft of the Rhine-gold;" the first part of the drama will be "The Walküre;" the second part, "Young Siegfried;" and the third part, "Siegfried's Death." The three dramas are completed; but I have still to put the prologue into verse. By the end of this year, I hope to be able to submit the printed poem to my friends. The working out of the whole subject (in my present state of health) will, of course, need a great deal of time; as to the performance, that must be

relegated to a nebulous "future." With regard to the scheme, you will receive full information in the very detailed "Communication to my Friends," in which I treat of my own artistic development. This "Communication" forms the preface to my three "opera poems"—*The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*. The book appeared at the beginning of this year, and I gave orders for a copy to be sent to you: probably you were forbidden to see it; but should this not be the case, let me know, and I shall see that the matter is put right. Instead of the pianoforte score of "Lohengrin," which you expected from Härtel, I am sending the full score of the opera which Härtel has just brought out, to your dear wife; she will ascertain if she may forward it to you. I am sure you will find the full score the more satisfying of the two. I am also sending you some shorter papers, on questions of art, which I have written at different times as the occasion

demanded. The most recent was a book of instructions for the performance of my "Tannhäuser." For you must know that at the present moment a considerable number of German theatres are preparing to bring it out; even the Berlin Court theatre is making arrangements for its performance, and I anticipate that ere long this opera will have been given in all our theatres. Unfortunately, this prospect can no longer give me pleasure—in every respect it comes too late; and besides, I know that the work will never be performed as I meant that it should be. Possibly, performers and public may appreciate the softer, more emotional parts of the work; but they will never realise the energy of passion that underlies it. I also greatly doubt whether this unexpected and growing fame will pave the way for a performance at a future day of my Nibelung dramas; for, in my opinion, the possibility of such a performance depends on conditions quite

alien to the prevailing ideas on life and art. The most painful thing to me—in spite of apparent success—is to recognise that I owe the greater part of this success to a misunderstanding of the true meaning of my work; on this subject I have no further illusions.

If you are once more allowed to occupy your time with literature, let me know whether I may send you books from time to time. I am sure you would find Feuerbach's writings most stimulating. I should also like to introduce you to a poet who has lately struck me as being the greatest of all poets—I mean the Persian poet, Hafiz, of whose writings we now possess an admirable German translation by Daumer. Truly, his poems have struck terror into my soul. We, with our pompous European culture and intellectuality, must stand abashed in the presence of this product of Oriental genius, stamped with such unerring mastery, such lofty serenity. I feel sure that you would share my

astonishment. To my mind, the only merit of recent European development is to be sought in a kind of universal disintegration; whereas in the work of this Oriental I recognise a precocious striving after individualism.

I mean shortly to write to your dear wife a long letter; how I wish that I could say anything to comfort and cheer her. My own affairs are shaping themselves pleasantly enough, and I am thankful to be relieved from pressing anxiety as to the more immediate necessities of life: but I am very lonely; I miss sympathetic surroundings, and more than ever I am painfully conscious that what in me is exceptional and peculiar acts like a curse, separating me from my kind, and cutting me off from the ordinary enjoyment of life. A prisoner would not understand why I so constantly am downcast and longing for death; and yet I feel it so strongly, and understand so clearly whence it comes. But enough on this subject. You

will laugh at me, and indeed I cannot dispute your right to do so. One thing I long for, and that is, that you may receive permission to write to me often; if you can hold out that hope, you will indeed give me a great pleasure. Farewell, and may you go on bearing up in your misfortune as bravely as hitherto. This is the earnest wish of your

Affectionate friend,

RICHARD WAGNER.

LETTER III.

DEAR FRIEND,

A short time ago I at length received long-expected news of you. From your letter I gathered that some books which I despatched for you had not yet reached you; so I applied to your excellent wife, but owing to her being ill it was some weeks before she could reply to me, and ever since then I have been deeply engaged in absorbing work. From all these causes there has been some delay in my answer, for which you must pardon me: hence, too, this feeble preface to my present letter.

I sent my new poem, "The Nibelung's Ring" (of which only a few copies are printed for private circulation among my intimate friends and acquaintances), in February of this year to

Weimar, in order that your wife might forward it to you. You do not mention it; but your wife maintains that the copy was sent to Waldheim: should it not yet have reached you, the omission must be due to causes which would make the despatch of a second copy quite useless. Therefore I think it better to trouble you once more in the matter: you might make definite enquiries. In the event of the book having been lost, let me know at once, as in that case a second shall be forthwith sent to Waldheim. In the meantime, and till I hear from you that you have read the book, further discussion of it is useless.

I had also destined for you at the beginning of last year my "Three Opera Poems, together with a Communication to my Friends" (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel), but from your letter I gather that the book never reached you; I therefore send it to your wife, in order that she may convey it to you. I have put up with it

two other works that you expressed a wish to have, *Hafiz* (in two volumes) and Feuerbach's *Lectures on the Nature of Religion.*

It seems to me, and I rejoice to think it, that you are in the mood and frame of mind when these books will be a real refreshment to you. I trust that you are well, and that you have succeeded in preserving that disposition of mind which allows one to be solaced by the inspiring influences of the Beautiful, even though doomed to the forced resignation of a captive. But in this respect you are, perhaps, no worse off at the present moment than the rest of us. As things are just now, the really Beautiful can only exist for us in a theoretical vision; that it could exist, that it will some day actually exist, and be apprehended and enjoyed by beings absolutely like unto ourselves in feeling—that thought alone can comfort us, as it must comfort you. Truly, this is our only consolation; and in sympathy with a future

generation, we already experience a quickened sense of well-being and gain. Therefore I do not hesitate about sending you *Hafiz*.

Feuerbach's book is to a certain extent a *résumé* of all that he has hitherto done in the field of philosophy. It is not one of his really celebrated works, such as *The Essence of Christianity*, or *Thoughts upon Death and Immortality*, but it is a short-cut to a complete knowledge of his mental development, and of the latest results of his speculations. I should be glad to think of you as strengthened and encouraged by contact with his clear, vigorous mind.

I also enclose a programme of some musical performances which I organised recently at Zürich; they will interest you. But you will wonder why I brought myself to consent to a concert performance of such a fragmentary selection from my operas. The matter is easily explained. In the first place I had an

intense longing to hear something out of "Lohengrin," more especially the orchestral prelude. In order to get together a sufficiently large orchestra for the performance, it was necessary to arrange for a regular concert, therefore I added other selections. The formation of this orchestra (consisting of about 70 musicians) cost not less than 9,000 francs, which sum, however, when I made my project known, was secured by guarantees. Any one who knows Zürich and its excellent *bourgeois* and Philistine community cannot fail to be astounded by this fact; and I confess that this proof of exceptional trust and unwonted affection touched me very deeply. The performances were perfect; I had brought the best musicians all the way from Germany, and the result was one of great and increasing artistic significance for Switzerland. For I do not doubt that—when I am ready for it—means will be provided here for an adequate performance, according to

my own ideas, of my dramatic works. To bring this about it will be necessary that I should devote myself for some years exclusively to the education of a company such as I require. When that is achieved I shall have all my operas, above all my Nibelungen drama, performed during a whole year in a theatre specially erected for the purpose, built of light materials, but adapted to the true needs of dramatic representation. I shall then have attained, if not my ideal, at least all that mortal man can aspire to. In the meantime I must save my strength and health—often very feeble—in order to accomplish the music of my Nibelung drama. This will take me at least three or four years.

The performance on different stages in Germany of my "Tannhäuser," and shortly of my "Lohengrin," have no interest whatever for me; I know that for the most part they leave my intention and meaning unexpressed, and that they in no essential way rise above the level

of ordinary operatic performances. Although from time to time I make surprising discoveries, and am especially astonished, by the effects produced in smaller theatres by these operas, thanks to the enthusiastic efforts of young conductors; yet, take it all in all, and in view of the general deplorable state of things, I cannot feel other than cold and unmoved; and I confess that the spread of my works is only valuable to me in regard to material advantages. Thanks to the improvement in these matters, my position has become much more tolerable, and especially do I enjoy the privilege of having no longer to work absolutely with a view to money. No matter what I undertake here, I decline to be paid for it (which indeed I should do even if I were entirely destitute of means; Art-producing for the sake of mere money is the one thing that would alienate me from Art, as indeed it is the cause of the confusion existing in so many minds on the truer nature

of Art and all its works). Thus I might say that my life is pleasant enough were I only different to what I am. As it is, not only do I feel the degradation of the general condition of things more keenly than others do; but as regards my own personal life, it is only in the last few years that I have realised—alas! too late—that I have never rightly lived. But on this subject I will not trouble you; such complaints were not meant for *your* ears. But this much I must say to you: my art is becoming more and more like the song of a captive nightingale haunted by illusions and longings, and it would suddenly lose all meaning if I were allowed to grasp at the realities of life. Yes, where life ends, Art begins. In youth we turn to Art, we know not how or why; and only when we have gone through with Art and come out on the other side, we learn to our cost that we have missed Life itself. If I could deceive myself with fresh illusions, all would be well; if

it were in me to be proud and vain, how happy might I not be at this moment. My fame is ever on the increase; I am looked upon as an unheard-of phenomenon, impossible to classify; pamphlets and magazine articles innumerable are written about me; misapprehension and admiration reciprocally work each other up. How unspeakably indifferent I remain to it all! Nothing would induce me to return for a moment to quill-driving, I am so discouraged by constant misapprehension of my writings, and disheartened by realising that the inner meaning of my whole being and of my views remains a closed book. One thing alone could avail to comfort me. Not only am I admired, I am also beloved—where criticism ceases, love steps in, and many hearts have been brought closer to me. But this very sympathy remains a thing apart, aloof from me; it only touches my life indirectly, and that life having taken the bend it has, I can only contemplate this wealth

of love as from a great distance. If I could become a thorough egoist it would be better for me; but there is no help for it, and, like you, I feel it is only by resignation that I can be true to myself.

Dear friend, I have been speaking to you about myself, and there are still many things of all kinds that I should like to tell you, but I cannot unload all my freight at once. I do wish that you could obtain leave to write to me more often; frequent communication is needed to keep up a flow, which otherwise gets stopped up by a certain restraint. I cannot write to you about yourself, for you alone can enlighten me and give me the key to your present existence; I do not even venture to tell you my opinion of yourself and of your position. What I think of you and feel towards you I must keep to myself, otherwise I should incur the suspicion of wishing to make you vain. All that I can say to you about yourself is, that I

should seem to myself very absurd if I were to attempt to give you advice; but if you can suggest any way in which the advice or counsel of a true friend could be of use to you, you would confer a happiness on me. If you think of anything let me know! I hope that my packet of books will reach you; I am with you in spirit while you read them. Let me know whether you have received the "Ring of the Nibelung," and, if not, whether you will be allowed to have it. It is the climax of my present artistic achievement. Answer this as soon as possible. And now, farewell for the present. If you are not able to write at an early date, let me know through your wife whether you will be allowed to receive another letter from me. I shall then take up the thread of much that I have left untold, as I have a great dislike to sitting down more than once to a letter, and at present my brain is quite dried up. Farewell. Keep up your courage and your

patience—we none of us can pull through without the one and the other.

Your

RICHARD WAGNER.

Zürich,

June 8th, 1853.

LETTER IV.

Zürich,

25th January, 1854.

How I came to leave your letter unanswered for almost four months is a matter easily explained to myself; but it will be more difficult to make it clear to you, my dearest friend. Anyhow, the chief blame is due to the importance and interest of your letter. To answer it in any way adequately was not so much a question of my will as of my power to do so. All last summer I was very unsettled. Liszt paid me a visit in July; later, I went to St. Moritz in the Grisons (6,000 feet above the sea); in the end of August to Italy—at least to such parts of it as are open to me,*—Turin,

* Owing to Wagner's exile from Saxony, the Austrian provinces were interdicted to him.

Genoa, Spezzia: from there I intended to go to Nice and to remain there for some time; but in a strange land my sense of solitude so overwhelmed me that suddenly, and partly in consequence of a purely physical indisposition, I fell into a state of melancholia, and set out with what speed I could across Lago Maggiore and the St. Gothard, and came straight home. While I was recruiting here your letter reached me, and at the same time I heard from Liszt asking me to meet him in Paris. I spent the month of October there, which caused the newspapers to infer that Liszt and I had the intention of bringing out my operas on the Paris stage. During all this confusion I was unable to answer your letter, and meant to do so on my return to Zürich. But once there, I was overcome with such an intense longing to get to work at the music of my "Rheingold" that I was not in a proper frame of mind to reply to your critical remarks on my poem. No! really

I could not. So I threw myself passionately—after an interval of six years—into music, and determined not to write till I had finished the composition of "Rheingold." Well, that is done, and now I understand my own reluctance to answer you sooner; for now, the work being accomplished, I am in a quite different position to reply to your criticism, or rather *not* to reply to it—that doubtless were best, for you are right in criticising; but I, too, am right in conceiving and carrying out the work as best I can and may. Therefore, I shall not quarrel with you about it, but I should like to talk it over a little with you.

But in the first place, and in regard to my actual letter, let me tell you what a boon you conferred on me by the accounts you sent me of yourself and of your well-being. I come back to it: you strike me as being almost happier in your position than I am in mine. Every line of your letter bears witness to your perfect sound-

ness and sanity. Now I admire you for this. The fact that you are allowed to write me a letter of five sheets proves that there has been an improvement in the actual conditions of your life, for which I am indeed thankful; though I must confess I can imagine circumstances under which I might have to forego every alleviation to existence, without suffering a pang on account of that which I was called on to renounce. One thing is paramount—freedom! But what is freedom? Does one mean by it—as our politicians seem to hold—lawlessness? Certainly not! Freedom is sincerity. He who is sincere—that is, true to himself, in perfect harmony with his own nature—he is free. Outward constraint is powerless unless it succeeds in destroying that sincerity in its victim, and inducing him to dissemble, and thus attempt to make himself and others believe that he is something different to what he really is. That alone is true servitude. But one need never

submit to that. Let a man be actually in bondage, if he preserves this sincerity of soul, he keeps his essential freedom intact, at least in a higher measure than another who has ceased to feel that constraint—active everywhere in the world—simply because he has submitted wholly to its power, and for its sake has consented to play the hypocrite.

I believe that this sincerity (Wahrhaftigkeit) is in fact no other than what philosophers and theologians mean when they talk of truth (Wahrheit). Truth is an idea, and by its nature is nothing else than sincerity in concrete form. The simple meaning of this *sincerity* is nothing else than *reality* (Wirklichkeit), or, better still, the *Real*, the *Actual* (das wirklich Seiende); and that only is *real* which is appreciable to the senses (sensuous), whereas what is non-appreciable to the senses is unreal and merely abstract and imaginary. If, therefore, I am right in considering *sincerity* as the most complete mani-

festation and expression of *reality*, *Truth* is nothing else than the abstract idea of this feeling, at least that is what it has become in philosophy. And yet this idea is as far removed from *reality* as *sincerity*, as I conceive of it, is akin to this latter, and consequently from all time no word has given rise to so much error as this word Truth, which gradually has become the source of every sort of fallacy, till finally the idea—as must always be the case with mere abstract ideas—has become nothing but a term (word), and out of terms one can always build up a system; but it is a very different matter to lay hold on reality. We have no certain experience of reality except through feeling, and feeling, be it remembered, is once and for all an affair of the senses.

It is clear that in using the word *senses*, the idea to be conveyed is not mere *animal* senses, as the term is contemptuously applied by philosophers and theologians, but the *human* senses

capable of reaching to the stars and of measuring their courses.

Having established this, I think we shall be at one in our views concerning the "World" (in so far as it is the domain for the exercise of this feeling of sincerity) if we allow ourselves to be guided exclusively by the one genuine source of experience, namely, sensation, and only pay attention to impressions derived from this source. Man, acting in conformity with his organisation, has recourse to endless expedients in order to grasp the Universe as a *whole*: these expedients in all their endless complexity are simply a group of concepts; and in our pride at having thus attained to a concept of the world in its entirety, we lose sight of our true position, forgetting that after all we have grasped nothing but the concept, and that consequently we are simply taking pleasure in the instrument of our own making, while all the time we remain further removed than ever from the *reality* of

the world. But the man who can find no lasting delight in the phantasms of this illusion at last becomes conscious that his own mind rebels against its tyranny. He recognises the unreality of this barren illusion, and feels impelled to turn to *reality* and to approach it by means of feeling. Then the question arises: how is this to be done, seeing that *reality* conceived of as a *whole* can only be made intelligible to the intellect, and cannot be brought into relation with feeling? It can only be done by recognising that the essence of reality consists of infinite multiplicity (Vielheit). This inexhaustible multiplicity, incessantly renewed and renewing, can only be apprehended by feeling, as the one ever-present though ever-varying element. This variability is the essence of the *real;* the unreal, or that which is imagined, alone being invariable and immutable. Nothing but what is variable can be real. To be real—to live—what is it but to be born, to grow, to bloom, to wither

and to die? Without death as a necessary concomitant, there is no possibility of life: that alone has no end which has no beginning; but nothing *real* can be without beginning, only abstract ideas.

Therefore to be at one with truth is to give oneself up as a sentient human being wholly and entirely to reality—to encounter birth, growth, bloom, blight and decay frankly, with joy and with sorrow, and to live to the full this life made up of happiness and suffering—so to live and so to die. This is "to be at one with truth." To make such a consummation possible we must entirely renounce the pursuit of the Universal. The Universal is made manifest to us only in separate phenomena, for of such alone can we in the true sense of the word take cognizance. Now we can only fully grasp a phenomenon if we can at one and the same time completely absorb it, and be absorbed by it. Where must we look for the most complete

example of this marvellous process? Ask Nature. We must look to love, and to love only. All that I cannot love remains outside myself, and I remain outside of it—a condition in which a philosopher perhaps, but not a sincere man, may imagine that he grasps phenomena. Love in its most perfect reality is only possible between the sexes; it is only as man and woman that human beings can truly love. Every other manifestation of love can be traced back to that one absorbingly real feeling, of which all other affections are but an emanation, a connection, or an imitation. It is an error to look upon this as only one of the forms in which love is revealed, as if there were other forms co-equal with it, or even superior to it. He who after the manner of metaphysicians prefers *unreality* to *reality*, and derives the concrete from the abstract—and, in short, puts the word before the fact,—he may be right in esteeming the idea of love as higher than the expression of love,

and may affirm that actual love made manifest in feeling is nothing but the outward and visible sign of a pre-existent, non-sensuous, abstract love; and he will do well to despise that love and sensuous function in general. In any case it were safe to bet that such a man had never loved or been loved as human beings can love, or he would have understood that in despising this feeling, what he condemned was its sensual expression, the outcome of man's animal nature, and not true human love. The highest satisfaction and expression of the individual is only to be found in his complete absorption, and that is only possible through love. Now a human being is both *man* and *woman*, and it is only when these two are united that the real human being exists, and thus it is only by love that man and woman attain to the full measure of humanity. But when nowadays we talk of a human being, such heartless blockheads are we that quite involuntarily we only think of man.

It is only in the union of man and woman, by love (sensuous and super-sensuous), that the human being exists; and as the human being cannot rise to the conception of anything higher than his own existence—his own being,—so the transcendent act of his life is this consummation of his humanity through love. He can only renew it, the whole of life being after all but a constant renewal of the multiplicity of vital phenomena; and it is this renewal which alone explains the true nature of love, approximating it to the ebb and flow of the tide—constantly changing, and ceasing only to begin afresh. It is therefore a grievous error to look upon that power in love, by virtue of which it constantly renews itself, as a weakness; and, on the other hand, to glorify as the real, lasting love that abstract, imaginary feeling, centred on God knows what, which after all is but the spectre of real love. The mere possibility of its indefinite continuance proves the unreal nature of

this abstract sentiment. Eternal, in the true sense of the word, is that which annuls finiteness (or, better, the idea of finiteness). But between the *real* and finiteness there is no connection to be established, for the *real*—namely, that which is characterised by change, renovation, and multiplicity—is the negation of what we imagine to ourselves as finite. The infinity of the metaphysician is eternal unreality. Finiteness is a mental image, which sure enough has power to strike terror into our souls; but it can only do this if we have lost our hold on *reality*. If, on the contrary, we are possessed by a sense of the reality of love, that terror vanishes, for love annihilates the notion of limitation. To sum up, only that which is real can be eternal, and it is through love that we attain to the most perfect manifestation of reality; therefore Love only is eternal. The fact is, egoism ceases at the moment when the "I" passes into the "Thou." But it is impos-

sible to keep a firm hold on the "I" and "Thou" if one is bewildered by notions of the Universal. "I" and the "Universe" merely mean "I" my own self; and the Universe is only then real to me when it passes into the "Thou," and this can only happen through the medium of the loved one. This process can be renewed through the medium of child, or of friend; but in order to love child or friend with a perfect love, a man must have first known what it is to lose himself in an all-absorbing feeling, and this he can only learn through his love to a woman. At the best, this feeling for child and friend is only a makeshift, a fact of which those are most conscious who have most fully realised the ecstasy of mutual love as between man and woman. All other affections are merely a proof of the multiplicity of our human nature, which brings to light strange anomalies, sometimes of an absurd, but equally often of a tragic, kind.

But enough! I venture to intrude on your solitude with this confession of faith, for I feel sure that there is no fear of your saddening yourself by agreeing with me. Not only you, but I—indeed, each one of us—live at the present moment under circumstances and conditions which we can only look upon as stop-gaps and makeshifts; for each of us the only true, the only real life can only exist in the imagination as an unattained ideal. I had reached the age of thirty-six before I had divined the true meaning of my creative impulse; up till then Art had seemed to me to be the end, life the means. But the discovery had come to me too late, and the result of following this new bent could not be other than tragic. A wider outlook into the actual world forces home the conviction that for the moment Love is impossible. It has come to this, that one of my friends, in addressing himself to Germans, could affirm with truth: "You do not know

what Love means. How should men be capable of loving who have no initiative of Character? The thing is impossible." Therefore if we must put up with a makeshift, it seems to me it were best frankly to accept things as they are, and to abide by this acknowledgment of the truth, even if this avowal bring us no other good than the proud consciousness of having gained a knowledge by means of which we may be enabled to guide the wills and aspirations of mankind into the way of redemption. It is true that in doing this we are working for humanity as a whole; but we are driven to it by realising the fact that the individual cannot be happy by himself, but only when all are happy can he obtain perfect satisfaction. As you perceive, this is quite your point of view; only for me it is not a final standpoint—merely a temporary platform, a means to an end. This end is still ignored by the majority of mankind; but I have indicated above what I understand it

to be, namely, the perfect consummation of love as the fullest, most complete perception of reality, of truth; but not an abstract, ideal, non-sensuous love (such as alone is possible in the present state of things), but the love of the "I" and the "Thou."

It follows that I look on all the prodigious efforts of the human race, and on all our actual science, as ways and means towards an end, which in itself is a very simple, but a very divine thing. I, therefore, respect all these efforts; I recognise a necessity in every onward step, and I rejoice heartily at each new advance; but personally I cannot take part in all this striving (which, strangely enough, is ignorant of its gain), seeing that the simple end to which it all tends stands out so prominently before me that I cannot turn my eyes away from the object to the means.

Only the pressure of a great movement could bring about such an act of self-denial on my

part; and I should hail that with joy as the sole means of redemption for me.

And now, you must not take it ill if I only smile at the advice you give me to tear myself away from dreams and egoistic illusions, and to devote myself to what alone is real to life itself, and its aspirations. For I, on the contrary, believe that I am devoting myself to absolute Reality, in the most effective, deliberate, and determinate way by carrying out my own views, even those that entail the most suffering, and by dedicating every one of my faculties to this end. Surely you yourself must agree with me if, for example, I deny to Robespierre the tragic significance which hitherto he has had for you, or only admit it with considerable qualifications. This type is peculiarly unsympathetic to me because in individuals constituted as he is there is no trace to be discovered of that which constitutes the true end and aim of humanity since our degeneracy from

Nature. The tragic element in Robespierre's character really consists in the spectacle he offers of utter helplessness, when, at the goal of his highest aspirations to power, he stands confronted by his own incapacity to make any sort of use of this power that he has attained. It is only in the confession of this helplessness that he becomes tragic, and in the fact that his own downfall is brought about by his inability to achieve anything towards the happiness of mankind. I am thus of opinion that his case is the precise converse of what you conceive it to be. He had no high end in view for the sake of which he condescended to unworthy means; on the contrary, it was to disguise this absence of any such end, and to conceal his own want of resource, that he had recourse to the ghastly paraphernalia of the guillotine, for it has been proved that the "Terror" was carried out purely as a means of government, and in maintenance of authority, without any sort of

genuine passion; it was conducted on purely political grounds—that is to say, in an ambitious and selfish spirit. In the end, this miserable being, who at last had no other resource than to advertise his inept "vertu," put the means in place of the end, as happens with all these purely political heroes, who duly come to grief from their own incapacity with such uniformity that it is to be hoped the whole class is shortly destined to disappear from history. On the other hand, I maintain that my "Lohengrin," according to my own conception,* symbolises the most profoundly tragic situation of our age, namely, the longing which besets us to descend from the highest heights of mortal contemplation and to plunge into the depths of human affection—the desire to be immersed in feeling—that desire which modern reality is as yet powerless to satisfy.

On all this I have enlarged sufficiently in my

* That is to say, not "Lohengrin" pruned down and distorted for the use of Opera Houses.

preface. It would only remain to indicate what, situated as I am, I feel impelled to do in furtherance of the aim of bringing both myself and mankind nearer to that which I recognise as the goal of human endeavour—a goal from which I, as an individual, am cut off, because the rest of mankind as yet deliberately cut themselves off from it—unless I were to have recourse to means which I can now no more bring myself to use. Here my art must come to my aid, and the work that I conceived under this influence is no other than my Nibelung poem. I am inclined to think that it was not so much the obscurity of my version of the poem, as the point of view which you persistently adopted in opposition to mine, which was the cause of your failing to understand many important parts in it. Such mistakes are of course only possible in the case of a reader who substitutes his own ideas for those of the poet, while the simple-minded reader, perhaps

unconsciously to himself, takes in the matter more easily, just as it is. For myself the poem can only be interpreted in the following way:—

Presentment of reality in the sense in which I have interpreted it above. Instead of the words—

> "A fateful day is dawning for the gods;
> And wilt thou not deliver up the ring?
> Then be assur'd thy race ere long shall end—
> Thy noble race—in shameful overthrow."

I now make Erda say merely—

> "All that is—ends:
> A fateful day dawns for the gods:
> I counsel you beware of the ring."

We must learn *to die*, and to die in the fullest sense of the word. The fear of the end is the source of all lovelessness, and this fear is only generated when love itself begins to wane. How came it that this feeling which imparts the highest blessedness to all things living was so far lost sight of by the human race that at last it came to this: all that mankind did,

ordered, and established was conceived only in fear of the end? My poem sets this forth. It reveals Nature in her undisguised truth, with all those inconsistencies which, in their endless multiplicity, embrace even directly conflicting elements. But it is not the repulse of Alberich by the Rhine-daughters—the repulse was inevitable owing to their nature—that was the cause of all the mischief. Alberich and his ring would have been powerless to harm the gods had they not themselves been susceptible to evil. Wherein then is the root of the matter to be sought? Examine the first scene between Wotan and Fricka, which leads up to the scene in the second act of "The Walküre." The necessity of prolonging beyond the point of change the subjection to the tie that binds them—a tie resulting from an involuntary illusion of love, the duty of maintaining at all costs the relation into which they have entered, and so placing themselves in hopeless opposi-

tion to the universal law of change and renewal, which governs the world of phenomena—these are the conditions which bring the pair of them to a state of torment and mutual lovelessness.

The development of the whole poem sets forth the necessity of recognising and yielding to the change, the many-sidedness, the multiplicity, the eternal renewing of reality and of life. Wotan rises to the tragic height of *willing* his own destruction. This is the lesson that we have to learn from the history of mankind: *to will what necessity imposes*, and ourselves to bring it about. The creative product of this supreme, self-destroying will, its victorious achievement, is a fearless human being, one who never ceases to love: Siegfried. That is the whole matter. As a matter of detail, the mischief-making power, the poison that is fatal to love, appears under the guise of the gold stolen from Nature and misapplied—the Nibelungs' ring, never to be redeemed from the curse that clings to it until

it has been restored to Nature and the gold sunk again in the depths of the Rhine. But it is only quite at the end that Wotan realises this, when he himself has reached the goal of his tragic career; what Loge had foretold to him in the beginning with a touching insistence, the god consumed by ambition had ignored. Later in Fafner's deed he merely recognised the power of the curse; it is only when the ring works its destroying spell on Siegfried himself that he realises that only by restoration of what was stolen can the evil be annulled, and he deliberately makes his own destruction part of the conditions on which must depend the annulling of the original mischief.

Experience is everything. Moreover, Siegfried alone (man by himself) is not the complete human being: he is merely the half; it is only along with Brünhilde that he becomes the redeemer. To the isolated being not all things are possible; there is need of more than one,

and it is woman, suffering and willing to sacrifice herself, who becomes at last the real, conscious redeemer: for what is love itself but the "eternal feminine" (das ewig Weibliche).

So much for the broad and general lines of the poem, which may be taken as summing up its more particular and special features.

I cannot believe that you have misapprehended my meaning and intention: only it seems to me that you have attached more importance to the connecting links and parts of the great chain than they, as such, deserve; and as if you had been bound to do this, in order to read into my poem your own preconceived ideas. As a whole I do not agree with your criticisms with regard to a certain want of lucidity and distinctness of statement: on the contrary, I believe that a true instinct has kept me from a too great definiteness; for it has been borne in on me, that an absolute disclosing of the intention disturbs true insight. What you want in drama—as indeed

in all works of Art—is to achieve your end, not by statement of the artist's intentions, but by the presentment of life as the resultant, not of arbitrary forces, but of eternal laws. It is just this that distinguishes my poetical material from all the poetical material which alone absorbs poets' minds at the present day.

For example, by insisting, as you do, that the intention of Wotan's appearance on the scene in "Young Siegfried" should be more clearly defined, you are prejudicing in a marked manner the fateful element in the development of the drama, which to me is so important. After his farewell to Brünhilde, Wotan is in all truth a departed spirit; true to his high resolve, he must now leave things alone, and renouncing all power over them, let them go as they will.

For this reason, he is now only the "Wanderer." Look well at him, for in every point he resembles us. He represents the actual sum of the Intelligence of the Present, whereas Siegfried is the

man greatly desired and longed for by us of the Future. But we who long for him cannot fashion him; he must fashion himself and by means of our annihilation. Taken in this way, Wotan is, you must acknowledge, highly interesting; whereas he would seem to us most unworthy if he appeared as a subtle intriguer, which indeed he would be if he gave counsel apparently against Siegfried, though in reality favourable to Siegfried and consequently to himself. That were a deception worthy of our political heroes, but not of my jovial god, bent on his own annihilation. Look at him in his juxtaposition to Siegfried in the third Act. In presence of his impending destruction, the god has at last become so completely human that—contrary to his high resolve—there is once more a stirring of his ancient pride, brought about by his jealousy for Brünhilde—his vulnerable point, as it has now become. He will, so to speak, not allow himself to be merely thrust aside; he

chooses rather to fall before the conquering might of Siegfried. But this part is so little premeditated and intentional, that in a sudden burst of passion the longing for victory overpowers him, a victory moreover which he admits could only have made him more miserable. Holding the views I do, I could only give the faintest and subtlest indication of my design. Of course I do not mean my hero to make the impression of a wholly unconscious creature: on the contrary, I have sought in Siegfried to represent my ideal of the perfect human being, whose highest consciousness manifests itself in the acknowledgment that all consciousness must find expression in present life and action.

The enormous significance that I attach to this consciousness which can scarcely ever find adequate expression in mere words, will be quite clear to you in the scene between Siegfried and the Rhine-daughters. Here we see that

infinite wisdom has come to Siegfried, for he has grasped the highest truth and knows that death is better than a life of fear: knowledge of the ring, too, has come to him, but he does not heed its power, for he has something better to do; he keeps it only as a proof that he at least has never learnt what fear means. Confess, in the presence of such a being, the splendour of the gods must be dimmed.

What strikes me most is your question, "Why, seeing that the gold is restored to the Rhine, is it necessary that the gods should perish?" I feel certain that, at a good performance, the most simple-minded spectator will be left in no doubt on that point. Certainly the downfall of the gods is no necessary part of the drama regarded as a mere contrapuntal nexus of motives. As such, indeed, it might have been turned, twisted, and interpreted to mean any conceivable thing—after the manner of lawyers and politicians. No, the necessity for this downfall

had to arise out of our own deepest convictions, as it did with Wotan. And thus it was all-important to justify this catastrophe to the feelings of the spectator; and it is so justified to any one who follows the course of the whole action with all its simple and natural motives. When finally Wotan gives expression to this sense of necessity, he only proclaims that which we have all along felt must needs be. At the end of "Rhine Gold" when Loge watches the gods enter Walhalla and speaks these fateful words: "They hasten towards their end who imagine themselves so strong in their might," he, in that moment, only gives utterance to our own conviction; for any one who has followed the prelude sympathetically, and not in a hypercritical, cavilling spirit, but abandoning himself to his impressions and feelings, will entirely agree with Loge.

And now let me say something to you about Brünhilde. You misunderstand her, too, when

you attribute her refusal to give the ring up to Wotan to hardness and obstinacy. Can you not see that it was for love's sake that Brünhilde sundered herself from Wotan and from all the gods, because where Wotan clung to schemes, she could only—love? Above all, from the moment that Siegfried had awakened her she has no other knowledge than the knowledge of love. Now the symbol of this—after Siegfried's departure—is the ring. When Wotan claims it from her, one thing only is present to her spirit—what it was that originally alienated her from him, her having disobeyed for Love's sake; and this alone she is still conscious of, that for Love she has renounced her godhead. She knows also that one thing alone is god-like, and that is Love; therefore let the splendour of Walhalla fall in ruins, she will not give up the ring (her love). Just consider how poor, avaricious and common she would have stood revealed to us, if she had refused the ring

because she had learned (possibly from Siegfried) of its magic, and the power of gold. Surely you did not seriously think such a thing of so grand a woman? But if you shudder because, being the woman she is, she should have preserved as a symbol of love just this ring on which the curse lay, then you will have penetrated my meaning, and will have understood the curse of the Nibelungs in its most terrible and tragic significance; then you will admit the necessity of the whole of the last drama of "Siegfried's death." That had to be compassed in order that the malign influence of the gold should be fully revealed. How did it come about that Brünhilde yielded so readily to the disguised Siegfried? Simply because he had wrested the ring from her, in which her whole strength lay. The terror, the fatality (das Dämonische) that underlie the whole of that scene seem entirely to have escaped you. Through the fire which it had been foreordained

that none but Siegfried should pass, which actually none but he had passed, another has made his way to her with but little difficulty.

Everything totters round Brünhilde, everything is out of joint; in a terrible conflict she is overcome, she is "forsaken of God." And moreover it is Siegfried in reality who orders her to share his couch; Siegfried whom she (unconsciously and thus with the greater bewilderment) almost recognises, by his gleaming eye, in spite of his disguise. You must feel that something is being enacted that is not to be expressed in mere words—and it is wrong of you to challenge me to explain it in words.

Well, I have certainly expanded pretty freely; the fear of doing so was really the cause of my delay in writing. I was perturbed to find that you had so completely misunderstood certain features of my drama. This has made clear to me, that only in its complete form and under favourable circumstances would the work be safe

from misapprehension, and as I was seized with a violent longing to begin the musical composition, I gladly gave myself up to my desire, before writing to you. The completion of the music of "Rhine Gold," at once so difficult and so important, has restored my sense of security, as you perceive. I now realise myself how much of the whole spirit and meaning of my poem is only made clear by the music; I cannot now for my life even look at the words without the musical accompaniment. In the course of time I hope to send you the score. For the present, all I need say is that it has worked up to a perfect unity; there is scarcely a bar in the orchestra which is not developed out of preceding *motifs*. But it is difficult to enter fully upon this in a letter.

What you say as to the carrying out and performance of the whole work meets with my full approval; on these points your judgment is infallible. I shall certainly follow your advice.

How I am ever to bring about a complete representation of the cycle is still a grave problem. But when the time comes I shall attack it, for otherwise I should be deprived of my one serious aim in life. I believe there would be no difficulty about the merely mechanical part of the undertaking; but how about my performers? The very thought makes me groan. Of course I must look to young artists who have not been already entirely ruined by our present Opera system. I don't even in my dreams think of so-called "stars." How I am to educate my young company is the question. What I should like would be to have my whole troupe together for a year, without allowing them to perform once in public. I should in that way have daily intercourse with them, and train them both on their human and their artistic side, thus allowing them gradually to ripen for their task. So under the most favourable conditions I could not count on a first performance before the summer of 1858.

But no matter how long it lasts, I feel something inspiring in such concentrated activity, for the sake of an object that is entirely of my own creation, which makes life worth living. As for the rest, I must turn a deaf ear to all your life-precepts and counsels; over these things one has no control—they come of themselves. Believe me, I too was once possessed by the idea of "the agricultural life." In order to become a radically healthy human being, I went two years ago to a Hydropathic Establishment; I was prepared to give up Art and everything if I could once more become a child of Nature. But, my good friend, I was obliged to laugh at my own *naïveté* when I found myself almost going mad. None of us will reach the promised land—we shall all die in the wilderness. Intellect is, as someone has said, a sort of disease; it is incurable. In the present conditions of life, Nature only admits of abnormities. At the best we can only hope to be martyrs; to refuse this

vocation is to put oneself in opposition to the possibilities of life. For myself, I can no longer exist except as an artist; since I cannot compass love and life, all else repels me, or only interests me in so far as it has a bearing on Art. The result is a life of torment, but it is the only possible life. Moreover, some strange experiences have come to me through my works. When I think of the pain and discomfort which are now my chronic condition, I cannot but feel that my nerves are completely shattered: but marvellous to relate, on occasion, and under a happy stimulus, these nerves do wonders for me; a clearness of insight comes to me, and I experience a receptive and creative activity such as I have never known before. After this, can I say that my nerves are shattered? Certainly not. But I must admit that the normal condition of my temperament—as it has been developed through circumstances—is a state of exaltation, whereas calm and repose is its abnormal condition. The

fact is, it is only when I am "beside myself" that I become my real self, and feel well and happy. If Goethe felt otherwise, I do not envy him on that account; as indeed I would not change places with any one,—not even with Humboldt, whom you look on as a genius, an opinion I cannot share. No doubt you feel just as I do, and are not prepared to change with any one; wherein you do wisely. I, at least, admire you sincerely.

After all, I am not so much out of touch with Nature as you seem to think, even though I am no longer in a position to have scientific dealings with her. In these matters I look to Herwegh, who lives here, and has for long been a profound student of natural science. From this dear friend I have learnt many beautiful and inspiring things about Nature, and they have influenced me on many and vital points. But rather than let Nature take the place to me of real life—namely of love,—I would let her go by the board.

In this respect I am like Brünhilde with the ring. Better to die,—to live without thought of joy,—than renounce one's belief. You must not think because I reply in this manner to your advice, that I am ungrateful to you for it; how could I be ungrateful for the love that prompts you? No; indeed I rejoice in that love, and cannot tell you how deeply I am touched by it. This feeling of gratitude is only equalled by a sense of admiration for the strength and at the same time for the gentleness of your spirit.

One thing I wish, and that is a speedy performance of the work which you tell me you have written. Can the thing not be managed? Send me more details about it, in case I could help you. Have you heard nothing from the Publisher Avenarius at Leipzig? Unfortunately he is the only one with whom I have any influence; for with my own publishing firms I have only had dealings through others, and never satisfactorily to myself. As soon as I

received your letter I wrote to him and begged him to correspond directly with you about terms, offers, etc. In spite of a second letter, I have had no answer from him.

I don't know what to send you just now that would be of interest to you. I myself have got quite out of the habit of reading; but if I come upon anything striking, I will pass it on to you.

My "Tannhäuser" is being performed almost everywhere in Germany; especially has it been taken up by the small theatres. The large ones, from reasons which one quite understands, still hold aloof. As regards the performances, I hear that they are for the most part wretchedly bad, so I do not quite know where the pleasure comes in. As I do not see them, I have ceased to be sensitive about this prostitution of my works; though a recent first performance of "Lohengrin" at Leipzig did make a very painful impression on me. I hear it was incredibly

bad. Amongst other things, not one word was clearly declaimed throughout the evening, except by the heralds. It has come to this, that I regret ever having given my works to the public. In Boston they have got the length of having Wagner nights,—concerts where nothing is given but my compositions. They want me to go to America; if they could provide me there with the necessary means, who knows but that I should do so? But to tour about as a giver of concerts, even for large sums of money, is what no one need expect of me.

And now, my dearest friend, I must stop. If necessary I could fill a folio of paper; there would be no lack of matter; but we must keep it for some other occasion. It is to be hoped—and see that you do it—that you will not keep me waiting so long for your letter as I kept you for this answer. Tell me much about your writings. If I have forgotten anything, I can retrieve it in my next letter. Now good-bye,

dear old friend. Hope,—for even I am not without hope.

Yours,

RICHARD WAGNER.

Zürich, 26th Jan., 1854.

To August Roeckel,
Schloss Waldheim,
Saxony.

LETTER V.

DEAR FRIEND,

I have this minute received your letter, and have put my work aside in order to reply to you at once and thus carry out an intention I have postponed for a year. A letter to you has burdened my conscience for long, and I can hardly understand why it has been so long unwritten; most probably the mood of the moment never set in the direction of writing, for on my lonely walks I have often written to you in my thoughts. But I have developed into a thorough-going pedant, and I am a prey to a sort of brooding, which makes all expansion impossible, and from which I seek refuge in work. But I won't waste time on excuses of this nature.

I have been comforted lately by news of my

wife's visit to you, and by the accounts she sends me of you. From her report it seems to me that any anxiety on your account was indeed uncalled for. Don't take me up wrongly. Your father, too, who came to see me here, put me in quite good spirits about you. In his clear, sensible, definite way, he gave such a quaintly reassuring account of you, that, I confess, we several times laughed heartily over it. The consequence of which is, that there is not much left to me to write to you about but myself, and in dealing with this subject there are various hindrances.

But to come to the point—and in the first instance as regards outward circumstances,—I continue to lead a life of the utmost seclusion, absolutely and entirely given up to my great work, the composition of my Nibelung dramas. In Germany my operas are steadily making their way; but it is still a slow business. "Tannhäuser" is given more or less every-

where except in Berlin, Brunswick, Vienna, Munich, Stuttgart, and the smaller theatres of Bavaria and Austria; in Prague and Gratz, however, it is given. "Lohengrin" follows suit, and is in high favour in the Rhine provinces and in Breslau; and in certain places the "Flying Dutchman" is being given. As regards the performances, I am quite convinced that they are poor, and that they would only distress me if I were to be present at them. I am particularly concerned about "Lohengrin," performed as it is without my having been able to show what I meant, by first putting it on the stage myself. The report that reached you as to its being given in Paris was certainly a *canard*. I have heard nothing of it, and even were it on the cards I should most probably forbid it. On the other hand, something quite new has turned up. The old Philharmonic Society in London has asked me to conduct their concerts this season. When their invitation

reached me, I felt as if I had dropped from the clouds. I had never troubled myself the least in the world about London, and had calmly accepted the fact last year that at these very concerts my "Tannhäuser" overture was not only massacred, but actually hissed. As I hesitated about accepting their invitation, they went so far as to send one of their directors to Zürich to secure me. At length I consented, as I felt that it was a case of repudiating, once and for all, any further connection with the Art public, or of accepting the hand they stretched out to me. The pay is not large, and as I do not contemplate any private speculation, I am merely going out of curiosity, in order to see what the people in London are about. If I had any ulterior design, it would be to get together, at some future date in London, a first-rate company in order to give all my operas, and more especially "Lohengrin." Well, the event will prove!

I start at the end of this month. The first concert is on the 12th of March, the last on the 25th of June. I expect to be back in the beginning of July on the Seelisberg, by the Lake of Lucerne, my favourite spot in Switzerland. There I shall recover from the worries of London, and hope to compose my "Young Siegfried." I have finished the composition of the "Walküre," amid much anguish of spirit, of which no one knows anything, least of all my excellent wife. Peace to the subject! I will complete the instrumentation in London; up to now I have only commenced it.

I only finished the fair copy of "Rheingold" last autumn. I at once sent the score to Dresden to have it copied by my old copyist there. Liszt, however, urged me so strongly and persistently to allow him to see the original, that I was obliged to interrupt the copying in order to let him do so. Liszt has only now returned the score to Dresden; as soon as the copy is

ready, either it or the original shall be sent to you provisionally. The upshot of all will no doubt be that you will improve (?) the whole thing out of existence. So much the better. I shall be delighted to see some specimens of your music. Possibly you will succeed better than I have done.

But now to deeper subjects. I do not mean to philosophize with you to-day, but shall let another do so in my stead. I have just sent an order to Leipzig to forward you a copy of Arthur Schopenhauer's book, *The World as Will and Idea.*

I hope you will be allowed to read this book, as there is nothing in it that has any objectionable bearing on your position. As you will get to know the book for yourself, I need tell you nothing about it, but I will give you some account of its author. Schopenhauer is at present 62 years old; he lives and has been for some time past in complete retirement at

Frankfort. Briefly, this has been his career. His chief work appeared as early as 1819; and in 1844 he published a fuller edition of it, with an extra volume. He took up his position as the direct heir of Kant, and this simultaneously with Hegel's appearance on the scene. Schopenhauer's philosophy, which completely demolishes the nonsense and charlatanism of the Fichte-Schelling-Hegel view, was absolutely ignored for forty years by the professors of philosophy, and this of purpose and intention. No one knew anything of him. At long last he was discovered by an English critic, and introduced to the world in a long article in the *Westminster Review*. This writer expresses his astonishment that a mind of Schopenhauer's eminence should have remained unnoticed for nearly half a century, though, naturally enough, he recognises that the philosophy was of a kind which forced these professors to seal up Schopenhauer hermetically, and shut him off from the world

at large, unless they meant to cut away the ground from under their own feet. The said article was translated into a Berlin paper, since when it has been impossible to ignore Schopenhauer, and now the miserable impotence of German philosophy since Kant has been laid bare and openly declared. The importance of the book is incalculable, but in a sense that will be far from satisfactory to many. For myself, I confess my experience of life had brought me to a point when only Schopenhauer's philosophy could wholly satisfy me and exercise a decisive influence on my whole life.

In accepting unreservedly the profound truths of his teaching I was able to follow my own inner bent, and although he has given my line of thought a direction somewhat different from its previous one, yet only this direction harmonized with the profoundly sorrowful conception I had already formed of the world.

I am sure that the book will have a great and

decisive influence on you; it may even be that you will find in it, should you require it, the unique consolation of which strong spirits more than others stand in need. I will say nothing further to you on the subject, but I feel that from henceforth we have a new and sublime interest in common on which we may exchange our ideas. In reading Schopenhauer I thought of you constantly, and it is with a feeling at once deep and solemn that I send you this work, which at a critical moment of my own inner life gave me courage to endure and strength to renounce. Do read it; I can confer no greater benefit on you. When you have finished it, write to me, and we can then discuss it. Address your letter to London, care of Ferdinand Praeger, 31 Milton St., Dorset Square. Your father, who has been most kind to me, recommended me to Praeger: I shall lodge with him on arrival. I shall anxiously await your next letter. For to-day you must

be satisfied with these few pages. As regards outward events I have nothing to tell, and for the things of the spirit I send you Schopenhauer. From London I shall write often and fully.

Farewell, dearest friend. Trust ever in me and in my affection. Kindest regards from my wife.

Your

RICHARD WAGNER.

LETTER VI.

22 Portland Terrace,
Regent's Park,
London.

DEAR FRIEND,

I have just read your letter, and feel prompted to answer it at once, or rather to send in exchange for it some of the ideas which came into my mind while reading it; for I cannot attempt to answer it in detail; to do so would lead me astray into too much hair-splitting. I perceive that you continue to be an obstinate optimist; and that, like unto your friend the Apostle Paul, Judaism in particular is still deeply rooted in your nature.

As regards myself, for long past it has been only with the greatest difficulty, and by per-

sistent rejection of the teaching of experience, that I had succeeded in maintaining an optimistic attitude towards life. It was thus a mere remnant of Hebrew superstition that had still to be cast out when I encountered the prodigious force of friend Schopenhauer's genius. Only with much travail was this superstition finally exorcised, but in the end there was comfort and that peace which comes to a man who has once for all done with self-deception and has attained the full measure of freedom that is possible to mankind. The deepest truth of Schopenhauer's doctrine, the truth that only the greatest minds have been able to grasp, rests on Kant's important discovery of the subjective character of all phenomena. We, too, must have fully grasped this truth before we can take one step further towards the comprehension of the "thing in itself" (Das Ding an sich); held, as you know, by Kant to lie outside the sphere of our knowledge, but

designated with convincing force by Schopenhauer as Will. I cannot pretend that I am at all times able to follow the process of the solution of this mighty problem, still less to expound it clearly. The clear realisation of the subjective character of time, space, and causality, as mere forms of perception, argues a mental process of so sublime a nature that, as Schopenhauer proves beyond dispute, it can only be possible to an abnormally organised brain, and under conditions of peculiar excitement. But no sooner have we comprehended this truth than all the illusions which have hitherto darkened our judgment vanish as if by magic, and of a sudden even words fail us to make our position plain; for our words hitherto have been adapted to the service of a far different knowledge than that to which we have now attained. The difficulty now is to communicate our ideas through this confused medium of word-symbols, without every moment giving occasion for mis-

understanding. It is therefore wisest to start from the simplest phenomena, namely, from those that lie nearest to our common experience. To have achieved this kind of clearness is Schopenhauer's extraordinary merit. But it is only to those who are capable of following him through those first and most important stages of his reasoning process that his meaning presents no stumbling-block; and it is just in that initial step that the difficulty lies. The following point, however, must be perfectly intelligible to any mind of a superior order, for it has been unanswerably demonstrated, and in fact serves as the point of departure of our modern natural sciences.

In normal man, all his senses, and more especially his organ of perception, namely, his brain, is entirely in the service of his Will. The emancipation of this faculty of perception from the service of the Will is thus an abnormal act, and can only take place with abnormal

organisations (having in a sense the stamp of monstrosity). In this exceptional condition which we recognise in its highest development as genius, the faculty of perception becomes conscious in the first instance of its normal condition, and, being thus liberated from the service of the Will, recognises the state of bondage to which it has been hitherto subjected, and asks itself: How does this dominating all-controlling Will manifest itself up to this point, when in an abnormal condition of liberated perception it ceases to assert itself? In answer to this question we have to admit, with a deep sense of shame, that this Will has sought nothing but to live, namely, to nourish itself by the extermination of others, and to reproduce itself by propagation. We can discover nothing in Will beyond this blind instinct.

Now in the abnormal condition in which this truth has become clear to us, we are forced to ask ourselves whether there is not some risk in

subjecting ourselves to the service of a Will so constituted, and we seek to penetrate further into the meaning of this phenomenon. We then recognise that this Will is identical in all perceptible manifestations, and that consequently all isolated phenomena are nothing but individuations of the same Will, recognisable as such by our faculty of perception, according to its fundamental forms of cognition—individual manifestations, that is to say, of an entity that is continually engaged in self-consumption and self-reproduction. This entity thus appears as something that is perpetually at variance with itself, something that subsists in a discord, of which the only fruit visible to us is pain and suffering.

The question then arises: To what height can this Will attain under the most favourable circumstances? Just to that point which we have reached when we recognise the possibility of the emancipation (that is to say in an

abnormal case) of one of its organs, namely, of the faculty of perception, from the service of the Will, and thus to a recognition of its essential character. And in acknowledging this, what do we gain? Clearly we gain the knowledge of the essential, the awful nature of this Will, and at length through this knowledge we attain to sympathy—*i.e.*, compassion with suffering (Mitleiden), for it is characteristic that we have no word to express sympathy with joy. At this point perception gains a moral import which hitherto had been ignored. Under the highest and most favourable conditions we attain to a sympathy with all things living, and by reason of their life, in unconscious bondage to the service of the Will. In this perfect unison with all that has been kept apart from us by the illusion of individuation lies the root of all virtue, the true secret of redemption. This has at all times been the point of departure of religion. But what deliverance is there from

the infinite pain of such a sympathy? Is it to be sought in an endeavour to make things easier, to mitigate to a certain extent by humane means this eternal conflict of the Will with itself, this terrible and increasing instinct towards self-consumption and self-reproduction? The man who could believe this and desire it has completely missed the perfect knowledge of which we have spoken; his perception would still be in complete bondage to the Will, as to whose true nature—thanks to the illusory effect of individuation—our enslaved faculties are still deceived. True insight (and it is this that is so difficult to grasp) has only come to us when—in an abnormal condition—we have renounced our individual Will, and thereby repudiated and denied the service of the Will. And there follows as the highest product of this knowledge the recognition that for him who has attained universal sympathy, redemption is to be found only in the deliberate negation of the Will—that

is, in realisation of its corrupt nature, and of the necessity of release from participation in its service. And in the first place the only conceivable and practicable way towards this liberation that is open to us lies in the renunciation through sympathy of our individual Will. And that amounts to nothing short of the complete negation, in fact to the annihilation, of the Will. Well, I must confess that this philosophy appeals profoundly to my heart and head—I can conceive of no loftier or truer teaching. All misapprehensions of the apparent disagreement between the individual Will and the Will of all things living outside myself, result from the defective understanding of the subjective character of our perceptions, in so far as they are conditioned by the fundamental forms of our cognition (Time, Space, and Causality). The man who has mastered this profoundest of all problems, to whom Time, Space, and Causality are no longer realities, has also grasped the

truth that his individuality based on these forms of perception is no reality, and he sees that not in the creation of these notions of Time, Space, and Causality, but in self-renunciation is to be sought the highest act of the Will. It does not occur to Schopenhauer to draw utilitarian and practical conclusions from the truth, or to formulate theories; for he knows that it is not the business of philosophy to conjure up new spirits, but that its mission is, on the contrary, to destroy as far as may be—seeing that our perception is still in bondage—the old phantoms of our enslaved perception. He is in no wise concerned to interfere with the peace of a man who, in order to enjoy life *quand même*, busies himself with the creation of fresh illusions; he only addresses those who truly desire to know. It follows that Philosophy, the sum total of all the sciences, can only end in negation, whereas all other speculation being in the service of the Will seeks truth in affirmation. This affirmation

carried out to its logical conclusion at all costs is nothing more nor less than Judaism, grown so powerful again at the present time, and embodying, as it does, the most miserably narrow-minded conception of the world that has ever been imagined.

From all time the minds that have attained, thanks to their abnormal organisation, to a clear perception have turned to the minds of the multitude still in bondage to the Will, and, having compassion on them, have sought a means of communication with them. Foremost among these enlightened spirits have been the founders of religions, and it has been their tragic destiny that they were forced to make use of such a language and of such symbols as are alone intelligible to ordinary unenlightened minds.

Certainly the Indian Prince Buddha spoke the language which most nearly gives expression to that lofty enlightenment. Thanks to recent

oriental studies, the scales have fallen from our eyes, and we can form an independent judgment of this wonderful personality, no longer seen through the distorting medium of the Hindoo religion of the present day. If we are to speak in terms understanded of the people of this highest perception, it can only be done under the form of pure and primitive Buddhist teaching. Especially important is the doctrine of the transmigration of souls as the basis of a truly human life—a life whose sympathy extends even to the inconscient animal and vegetable world. Surely this doctrine is the happiest inspiration of a sublimely sympathetic spirit.*

The latest scientific inquiries have established beyond dispute that the idea underlying Christianity has its origin in India. The enormous difficulty, nay, the absolute impossi-

* It is barely necessary to remind the reader that Wagner was mistaken in attributing the ancient Indian doctrine of the transmigration of souls to Buddha, as if it were an invention of his.

bility of grafting on to the barren stock of Judaism this sublime truth, which has as its central thought contempt of the world and negation of the will to live, has alone been the cause of all those contradictions which hitherto have so sadly distorted Christianity that its pure image can scarcely be recognised. For the quintessence of Judaism is that heartless unreasoning optimism, to which all things are right so long as purse and stomach are well-filled; and for this there is no lack of opportunity, provided one sets about it in the right way, accepting the world as it is, and twisting all things to one's own advantage. In contrast to this, how divine is the recognition of the vanity and nothingness of this world manifest in the faith of primitive Christianity, and how sublime is Buddha's doctrine, which makes us one through sympathy with all things living!

In judging other details of Schopenhauer's philosophy—for instance, his treatment of the

penal code,—you must remember, as I have already said, this philosopher never makes postulates, nor does he express approval or disapproval, but he rests satisfied with establishing the essential character of all phenomena. For instance, he demonstrates what the State is, what justice is, and so on; but not what they ought to be. Far from it, and if you are not satisfied with things as he shows them to be, by so much the more are you at one with Schopenhauer, who turns his back on the whole business, saying, as it were: "See, so much is within your reach, these are the makeshifts which allow you to continue affirming your will to live. It is on sophistries of this nature that are founded what you are pleased to call humane methods for the difficult task of preserving the human race, though you are quite well aware how much 'justice' is in them; but don't imagine that you impose upon me, and, above all, don't prate to me, forsooth, of a State philosophy and similar

nonsense." From all which it follows that if we would fain allay the divine thirst for sympathy aroused in us by the clearer insight that has come to us, we must seek satisfaction elsewhere than in any conceivable social and civil institutions.

By-and-by I will send you Schopenhauer's minor writings, among which there is a very exhaustive treatise on Somnambulism, etc. From this you will see with what rare and profound insight this philosopher has dealt with this problem, and how from a phenomenon, in which we are aware of an activity implying a second intuitive faculty, he deduces convincing proof of the subjective character of our ordinary methods of cognition,* of the unity of the Will in all things that have life, and of the illusiveness of the sense of individuality, so that the problem of the denial of the Will at once becomes intelligible.

* *i.e.* that we are deluded in thinking we have any direct knowledge of the external world. Each of us knows only a reflex inside his own head.

But enough of this. The object of my demonstration was not so much to teach you (for certainly you will do this best yourself), as to clear the whole subject up once more for myself, for I must tell you that this profound philosophy colours my mental processes from day to day, and that I now contemplate the world from a point of view which allows me to recognise facts of deep and irresistible significance—facts in relation to which I used formerly to practise systematic self-deception, in the vain endeavour to remain true to optimistic delusion.

Especially am I deeply moved by contemplation of the position of animals, so shamefully ill-used and ill-treated by mankind, and I am glad to be able to give way without shame to the strong sense of pity which I have always felt, and no longer to have to seek about for sophistries to whitewash the wickedness of men in this respect.

As for the rest, if anything could increase my

contempt of the world, it would have been my expedition to London. Suffice it to say briefly, that I have bitterly atoned for my own folly in allowing myself, in spite of experience, and through mere foolish curiosity, to be beguiled into accepting the present engagement. What more can I say? At the best, I have nothing to hope for here, and my presence as conductor of these concerts can only lead to fresh misunderstandings. I have not even had the satisfaction of giving really beautiful performances of Beethoven's works, for each time it has only been possible to have one rehearsal; and even had the orchestra been better, that is not enough to establish a thorough understanding with the players. That the Jewish press here should cut me up is a matter of profound indifference to me; I am all the more glad that other journalists, and particularly my own audiences, do not let themselves be led astray, and do justice to me, in so far as they

are able. But I recognise that it is not now possible for them to do so fully, and consequently I heartily repent having come here. Now, I must hold out till the end of June. It is useless to think of having a German opera here (that is, a good one); and even if it were possible, I should not wish for a performance of my own operas. It would not be possible—and what would be the good? It is only the work itself that can interest me now, not its success. Besides, I am always depressed here, and my work gets on very slowly. I see a great deal of Praeger here—a good, crazy fellow. Lately Edward* was here on a visit. I am going to him at Bath for a few days' holiday. Did we, or did we not, speak much of you? For the rest, I avoid new acquaintances, but I mean to look up N. S. Tulk. Thanks for the suggestion. "Tannhäuser" is actually going to be given at Berlin, but without Liszt, as I was not

* Edward Roeckel, brother of August.

in a position to insist upon it, and could no longer do without the fees. That I intended to conduct it myself was a mere *canard;* I have heard nothing to that effect, and in all probability shall hear nothing. In summer I return—*viâ* Paris—to my beloved Switzerland, which I do not mean ever to leave again. Retirement, beautiful scenery, and work—these constitute the element in which alone I can live and move and have my being, and from which I will never again be dragged away. Excuse more to-day; perhaps I shall soon write again, as there may be something to add on various points. Farewell, and be as ever of good courage.

Your

RICHARD WAGNER.

LETTER VII.

Zürich,

August 23rd, 1856.

Your letter, my dearest friend, far from rousing a combative spirit in me, has only confirmed me in the belief that in this world nothing is gained by discussion. That in us, which is essentially and fundamentally our own, is not our conceptions (Begriff) but our intuitions (Anschauung). These, however, are so inalienable a part of our being, that we can never wholly express them, never adequately communicate them; for even the most complete attempt in this direction—the achievement of the artist, the work of Art—is apprehended by others purely in accordance with their own intuitions. How can an artist expect that what

he has felt intuitively should be perfectly realized by others, seeing that he himself feels in the presence of his work, if it is true Art, that he is confronted by a riddle, about which he too might have illusions, just as another might? Now, would you suppose it possible for an artist to be helped to a clear understanding of his own work by an intelligence other than his own? As to this, I am in a position to speak, as on this very point I have had the strangest experiences. Seldom has there taken place in the soul of one and the same man so profound a division and estrangement between the intuitive or impulsive part of his nature and his consciously or reasonably formed ideas. For I must confess to having arrived at a clear understanding of my own works of Art through the help of another, who has provided me with the reasoned conceptions corresponding to my intuitive principles.

The period during which I have worked in

obedience to my intuitions dates from "The Flying Dutchman." "Tannhäuser" and "Lohengrin" followed, and if there is any expression of an underlying poetic motive in these works, it is to be sought in the sublime tragedy of renunciation, the negation of the will, which here appears as necessary and inevitable, and alone capable of working redemption. It was this deep underlying idea that gave to my poetry and my music that peculiar consecration, without which they would not have had that power to move profoundly which they have. Now, the strange thing is, that in all my intellectual ideas on life, and in all the conceptions at which I had arrived in the course of my struggles to understand the world with my conscious reason, I was working in direct opposition to the intuitive ideas expressed in these works. While, as an artist, I *felt* with such convincing certainty that all my creations took their colouring from my feelings, as a

philosopher I sought to discover a totally opposed interpretation of the world; and this interpretation once discovered, I obstinately held to it, though, to my own surprise, I found that it had invariably to go to the wall when confronted by my spontaneous and purely objective artistic intuitions. I made my most remarkable discovery in this respect with my Nibelung drama. It had taken form at a time when, with my ideas, I had built up an optimistic world, on Hellenic principles; believing that in order to realize such a world, it was only necessary for man to wish it. I ingeniously set aside the problem, why they did not wish it. I remember that it was with this definite creative purpose that I conceived the personality of Siegfried, with the intention of representing an existence free from pain. But I meant in the presentment of the whole Nibelung myth to express my meaning even more clearly, by showing how from the first

wrong-doing a whole world of evil arose, and consequently fell to pieces in order to teach us the lesson, that we must recognise evil and tear it up by the roots, and raise in its stead a righteous world. I was scarcely aware that in the working out, nay, in the first elaboration of my scheme, I was being unconsciously guided by a wholly different, infinitely more profound intuition, and that instead of conceiving a phase in the development of the world, I had grasped the very essence and meaning of the world itself in all its possible phases, and had realized its nothingness; the consequence of which was, that as I was true to my living intuitions and not to my abstract ideas in my completed work, something quite different saw the light from what I had originally intended. But I remember that once, towards the end, I decided to bring out my original purpose, cost what it might, namely, in Brünhilde's final somewhat artificially coloured invocation to those

around her, in which, having pointed out the evils of possession, she declares that in love alone is blessedness to be found, without (unfortunately) making quite clear what the nature of that Love is, which in the development of the myth we find playing the part of destructive genius.

To this extent was I led astray in this one passage by the interposition of my intellectual intention. Strangely enough, I was always in despair over this said passage, and it required the complete subversion of my intellectual conceptions, brought about by Schopenhauer, to discover to me the reason of my dissatisfaction, and to supply me with the only adequate key-stone to my poem* in keeping with the whole idea of the drama, which consists in a simple and sincere recognition of the true

* This new version of the final verses of *Goetterdaemmerung*, to which Wagner here refers, was later on cancelled as the first had been; the poem was allowed to finish without any trace of moral reflection and doctrine.

relations of things and complete abstinence from the attempt to preach any particular doctrine.

My reason for imparting to you this mental process, which cannot be considered devoid of interest, is to make my own position clear to you. Once this problem of the difference between intellectual conceptions (Begriff) and intuitions (Anschauung) had been solved for me by Schopenhauer's profound and inspired penetration, I ceased to think of it as a mere abstract idea, for I realised it as a truth, which was borne in on me with such convincing force that, having fully recognized its nature, I was satisfied to accept it for myself, without committing myself to the presumptuous mistake of attempting to force it on others by means of dialectic. I am profoundly conscious myself that I should never have been convinced by such means, unless my own deepest intuitions had been satisfied; and therefore I see that if

the truth of which I have spoken is to be brought home to any one, he must have felt it intuitively before he can grasp it intellectually.

We can form no abstract conception of a thing unless we have previously grasped it as a living intuition; if a man realizes that clearly, especially if he feels himself as little of a philosopher as I do, he will not have much inclination to pose as a dialectician. My only language is Art. Nevertheless, I ask you, in order to sum up the whole matter, can you conceive of a moral action of which the root idea is not renunciation? And what is the most ideal holiness, namely, full and perfect redemption, if it is not the recognition of this truth, as the basis of all our action?

But even with these simple questions I go too far, and become more abstract than is advantageous to myself. Therefore let me tell

you a few more things about my concrete personality.

I am an Artist, nothing else, and that is at once my blessing and my curse; otherwise I should have wished to have been a saint and to have ordered my life in the simplest way. As it is, fool that I am, I strive and struggle to achieve rest, by which I mean the completed rest of an undisturbed, tolerably comfortable life, in order that I may have nothing to do but to work and to be an artist.

To attain this is so difficult, that in my constant pursuit of rest I am often obliged to laugh at myself. Since last I wrote to you I have been pretty wretched. The London expedition was a foolish inconsistency on my part, for which I have patiently submitted to punishment, even to the extent of remaining to the end of my engagement. While there, all power of work left me. I had meant to finish the score of "The Walküre," but my memory

of what I had meant it to be vanished. I returned to Zürich ill, and in the course of the winter, during repeated attacks of erysipelas, completed the "Walküre" with difficulty (but, between ourselves, it is well done). In the beginning of summer I went to the neighbourhood of Geneva, where, under the direction of a first-rate doctor, I underwent a most beneficial course of hydropathy, which I have just completed, and have returned here, where I found your letter awaiting me. It was too soon to think of commencing the composition of "Young Siegfried." Liszt is going to visit me at the end of September: I shall go through my two finished scores with him; and then I hope to start on "Siegfried" refreshed and inspired, and to present it finished to the world by the end of next year.

That is all I have to tell you of myself. With sore difficulty I got, while in London last year, a finished copy of "Rhine Gold" from

Dresden. I left it behind with a young friend and gifted musician, Klindworth, in order that he might make a good pianoforte arrangement of it. He had the misfortune to be ill himself for a long time, and has only recently returned me the full score and the completed arrangement for the pianoforte; a fair copy of the latter must be taken here, and for this purpose the copyist must have the score on account of the annotations. When the copy is finished I can do what I like with the score, and I promise that you shall have it after Liszt's visit. As yet no copy has been made of the "Walküre," as I have only one good copyist here, and he has not much time. I am so unwilling to let my original scores out of my hands that I shall not send the "Walküre" to Dresden to be copied; not so much for fear of its loss, though that would be serious enough, as because I need to have it at hand in order to go on with the work. So you must kindly

excuse delay in the receipt of my works, and attribute it to above-mentioned circumstances.

I will get you Schopenhauer's minor works. There is so much that is new and important in them, that I can promise you pleasure from them, in spite of the undeniable asperities and prejudices of a pronounced misanthrope which may occasionally repel you. At the same time I will send you the score of my "Faust" overture, which, owing to an unexpected suggestion, I retouched. In its present form it seems to me not unworthy of myself. But the books must be sent from Leipzig. As regards the external events of my life, the German theatres continue giving my operas very badly, and none the less with a persistent success that fills me with humorous amazement. Efforts are being made to procure permission for me to return to Germany, especially on the part of the Grand Duke of Weimar, who has interested himself actively in the matter, but

without, so far, a favourable result. For my part, what I chiefly desire for myself is health to carry out all the schemes of which I am full; unfortunately, more full than need be, for, besides the Nibelung dramas, I have got a "Tristan and Isolde" (in which Love is treated as a power of anguish) in my head, and also a wholly new subject, "The Conquerors" (a Buddhist legend concerning final Redemption). I am so possessed by both of them that it requires some steadfastness of purpose to force them into the background in favour of the "Nibelungs."

Now, dearest August, you see in black and white what I, who am still in need of rest, could do at one bound. Keep up your cheerful spirits and your clear-headedness, and suit your philosophy to your needs. At the best we can only know what we desire to know; for you must allow that, in spite of our knowledge, we are nothing more or less than embodiments of

will, and as such the most powerful, if not the wisest, of things created. Farewell, and believe me,

Your

RICHARD WAGNER.

LETTER VIII.

To Mr. August Roeckel,
Weimar.

Biebrich, *March 6th, 1862.*

You will easily believe, dear friend, by how many and what varied feelings I am moved each time I think of the Past we had in common, of your imprisonment, and now at last of your liberation. Accept my sympathy on this last turn of events, and above all let me congratulate you, if you are able truly to enjoy your liberty. It is not easy to make clear what I mean by this. Anyhow, you are at present in an enviable position. It is as if you were awakened from a long winter's sleep; thanks to your incredibly vigorous nature, your powers are strengthened, and at the same time have kept their freshness.

You have suffered much, but your sufferings now may pass for dreams: they have not changed you in any way; for, as I can see from your printed report, not only have you remained the same in all respects, but your desire to take things up exactly where you left them has strengthened. It is nothing short of a miracle, and it does not occur to me to pity you, for I should not know where my condolences would come in. As you have chosen open political agitation for the field of your future activity, it follows that you are full of hopes for the future of events. With so wide a field of vision before you, cares for your home and family must seem to you secondary considerations. Your nature demands a sphere of activity which shall bring you into touch with men and things, and you will have no difficulty in gratifying your desire. In short, everything that has become a burden to me, and all that I avoid on principle, appears desirable to you and

attracts you, and the freshness which you have kept, thanks to your long privation, will save you from a too speedy disillusionment and disgust. As for me, I shall watch you with great interest, and shall rejoice that a man of such parts and so good a fellow as yourself should have been preserved in full vigour for a work which I recognise as necessary, though personally feeling no vocation for it. When I tell you further that I ask nothing of the world but that it should leave me unmolested, granting me only what is necessary to my happiness—namely, leisure and peace of mind for my work; when I add that, with a willing servant and a dog, I have all that I want, and can get on perfectly well; and that, with the exception of a really clever friend (whom I entertain as an angel), I can exist without seeking intercourse with anyone, you will understand with what peculiar feelings I shall contemplate you attaching yourself once more actively to a party and

cheerfully associating yourself with blockheads and riffraff of all sorts. But that is your affair.

To give you fuller particulars about myself, I must tell you that I have with infinite difficulty established myself here in great privacy and retirement, in order to produce a new work. My wife, to my surprise, came from Dresden to help me. She remained here ten days, and it was during the early part of her visit that your letter arrived. As regards the Art World and the Theatre, I mean in the future to have as little as possible to do with either of them; in this way, I shall perhaps succeed, as you succeeded in prison, in thinking better of the world than it deserves (though a single visit to the Weimar Theatre promptly dispelled all your illusions). Therefore I am striving to shut myself up in a similar prison, if possible, in solitary confinement. Believe me, my imprisonment is not less involuntary than yours was. There is not much difference in the matter of constraint; in

fact, brutal constraint such as you were subjected to may agree better with an energetic nature than does the fate which forces me into seclusion. But I will not deny that I should most probably have submitted just as little as you did to the constraint imposed on you. Sometimes, indeed, I used to wish that you might free yourself at whatever cost, and I used to urge your people to go through with all the necessary forms. I now see that you could not have done it, and I feel the utmost admiration for your behaviour towards your tormentors. Clearly your conscience must be your only reward. But if you mean to pursue politics, I am curious to know how you will begin. In my opinion, it would be wisest if you were to seek office in some Liberal service, for I am almost convinced that nothing can be achieved in politics save in a practical way, and armed with power. And this is, after all, the one essential thing in a sphere where obviously you can do

no more than deal with the urgent necessities of the moment, undertaking from time to time necessary repairs, without which there would be confusion and an absolute block. According to my experience, to be political means always to have nothing else in view but what is possible in an immediate future, for then only can you hope for results; and political activity, without results, is sheer nonsense. Ideas belong to the domain of Philosophy, but have no meaning to the majority of mankind, with whom any higher form of thought at once becomes superstition or folly.

Well, I hope we may meet before long; a trip eastwards is not an altogether impracticable idea to me, and most gladly in that case would I stop at Weimar. You will, I hope, find me quite unchanged; indeed, more accessible as regards hopefulness and belief in progress than I could wish, which only means that one will always be an ass. I am glad just now to be

engaged on a work which gives me pleasure.* Would to God I had got well into it. Once more, thanks for your letter, and do not misunderstand me in any respect. I am a suffering mortal—nothing more. Farewell! Be heartily welcome amongst free-ranging bipeds, and believe with what genuine envy I look on you. Best remembrances to your people.

Yours,

RICHARD WAGNER.

* Wagner was just finishing the poem of the *Meistersinger* when he wrote these lines.

LETTER IX.

To Mr. August Roeckel,
Weimar.

Biebrich-on-the-Rhine,
April 5th, 1862.

DEAREST FRIEND,

I have a friend here, a most gifted young musician from whom I look for great things, and who is attached to me with a most touching devotion; he would feel happy for the rest of his life if he could secure a really fine poem for an opera. I have spoken to him about "Wieland."* Now, great politician, tell me,

* A detailed sketch of a lyrical drama, which Wagner wrote in 1849, but never attempted to carry out; he offered it to Liszt, Berlioz, and Roeckel. It will be found in the 3rd volume of his writings.

do you ever mean to compose opera again? Frankly, I don't believe it. You have not said anything to me about the scheme of the libretto. I doubt your doing it; probably you have some reason against it. Anyhow, it would amply satisfy my young friend if he could try his skill as a musician and develop his talents on a really poetical subject. So if you can swear to me with your hand on your heart that you do not believe you will ever use "Wieland," I will frankly ask you to return the manuscript to me here. Assuming that this is so, I should be very glad. Therefore, think over it, ponder it well, and decide.

I have a feeling that you may have taken my last letter amiss. If so, you did wrong. It so happened that I was in an evil mood just then. Now things begin to look brighter. I am suffering from an old complaint, which uses up half my vital energy to no purpose.

But enough. My wife has obtained for me a

complete pardon and permission to enter Saxony freely. But I shall remain here unmoved, where I am quite comfortably established, and where I have had—up till now—perfect peace for work. For the present this work rules my life despotically; in every respect, both from within and without, it is the one thing necessary for my self-preservation. I absolutely do not know where to lay hands on a Thaler, unless next winter I have something new to launch "for the theatre." Therefore, for the present, judge me according to this my necessity. Write to me, or, better still, come to the Rhine. This summer I shall not budge from this place. I must not.

Farewell. Best regards to all your people, and send me soon good accounts of yourself.

Affectionately yours,

R. WAGNER.

LETTER X.

To August Roeckel,
Weimar.

Biebrich,
April 23rd, 1862.

DEAR FRIEND,

Your letter has brought vividly to mind the old days. There was a peculiar "something" about that time when we were together. I, too, long to be with you once again. Tell me, could not we tryst your brother here on the Rhine when he has his holidays, and all be merry together like boys for a week? Here we should be perfectly undisturbed, which, so far as I am concerned at least, would not be so easy elsewhere. I hope, towards the end of

May, to pass through Weimar, and to spend a day with you. When the time approaches let me know where you will be. But if you feel inclined to visit me first for a couple of days, do come; it so happens that I am in a position at present to pay your travelling expenses.

In summer (June and July) the Bülows are coming here.

Such things are the only joy in life, and I would give all the world to be able always to have a friend staying with me. If one lives near each other all one's life in a large place, it does not come to the same thing: one can never thoroughly enjoy one's friends by seeing them in snatches. Therefore, decide quickly. I had rather not come to Weimar to see you.

Farewell. Be wise, and come.

Yours,

W.

LETTER XI.

To Mr. August Roeckel,
Weimar.

Biebrich, June 17th, 1862.

DEAREST FRIEND,

I was delighted to hear from you again. Be sure you make out the visit. I remain here the whole summer. If it suited you, I should prefer that you came to me early in July. About that date the Bülows are coming here for some time. I shall have forthwith to read them "The Meistersingers," and I should like to read it to you as well, but as I have several times had to do so already, I have lost some of the freshness for such undertakings, and it always takes it out of me; therefore

I should be very glad if you would communicate with the Bülows (Hans von Bülow, 12 Schöneberger Strasse, Berlin), and, if possible, fix the same date for your arrival at Biebrich. Bülow might then inform Schnorr (in Dresden) of the date, for he proposes to pay a visit about that time to submit to the same ordeal.

As a rule I live in such solitude and retirement that I greatly look forward to this combined outburst. It will do me a world of good. Another reason for choosing this time is, that I shall be then in a position to let you hear my new things to some advantage. Hans will play, and Schnorr, who is a very good musician, will help with the singing, of which I nowadays can make but little. Of course Edward will be heartily welcome.

I am very anxious and curious to see you again. It seems strange to me that I should go on living, when I have outlived so much in

myself and my surroundings, and on the whole, alas! to feel so unchanged, that I often appear to myself like a ghost. Heaven knows, when thinking of you, I often quite forget the incredibly long episode of your imprisonment, and go back in thought to the time of our Dresden walks. And yet your appearance must have changed considerably. The enclosed will show you what I looked like two years ago.

Well, we shall see!

Yesterday I caught myself once again in a burst of political rage. I felt strongly moved to write to the Swiss advising them not to come to the Frankfort Rifle Meeting: those asses having behaved in such a compromising way to the Italians. It would have been an excellent lesson to them and well-deserved. Perhaps you will write. However, you have a political position and must keep up appearances — it stands to reason one has

sometimes to be prudent. The Devil take you politicians!

However, *au revoir*. Make all the necessary arrangements.

Heartily yours,

R. W.

LETTER XII.

To Mr. August Roeckel,
Editor of the *Frankfort Reform*,
Frankfort-on-the-Main.

MY DEAR OLD FRIEND,

Your book* is terrible!

It is all written with such modesty, such restraint, such unwavering love of humanity, and at the same time it excites one to the pitch of madness.

You certainly are one of the most extraordinary of men, and God knows what you may yet do. With your faith you might remove mountains—there can be no doubt of that.

It would be hard to quarrel with you; I have not the least intention of doing so.

I simply devoured your book.

* *The Revolution in Saxony, and my Imprisonment in Waldheim.*

I feel much as you did in prison. How am I to escape? I need rest and concentration to fulfil my mission, which no other man can do for me. But—how to get rest? When lo! of a sudden, a young man appears, as if from heaven, destined for me by the stars.* He knows me, and understands me as if by inspiration, as no one else has done. He thanks Fate that has called him so young to the throne, in order that he may befriend me, and realise my ideal. This is his one aim and object. There! And now, on the other hand, just conjure up before your fancy Bavaria!—Munich!—and you will be able to imagine the rest. What I long for above all is, rest—for I can bear it no longer, and a general sense of disgust overwhelms me!

But what am I to do? I long to get away to some beautiful corner of Italy, to live as a stranger—a lazzarone—and to rest my shattered

* Reference to Louis II. of Bavaria.

nerves. But how can I desert this young King, who clings to me with his whole heart, and leave him to his disgraceful surroundings? That is my position. What will become of me? What can I do? That is what I ask myself, and no answer comes—no human being can tell me—I am too tired!

As to you, I have no fears. You have your vocation, and you will fulfil it. You have even sufficient sense of humour to stick to the Frankfort newspaper.

Accept my best thanks. You have once more done excellently, and your book is worth fully as much as your imprisonment.

Farewell; and keep your affection for me, as I shall ever be heartily true and attached to you.

Your

R. W.

Munich, *March 7th, 1865.*

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